DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 900 CE 057 794

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TITLE ". . . This Is a Lifetime Thing." Outcomes for Adult Basic Education Students from Hackney Adult Education Institute and the Hackney Reading Centre.
INSTITUTION Access to Learning for Adults, London (England).
PUB DATE Jun 89
NOTE 41p.; For a related document, see CE 057 795.
AVAILABLE FROM Access to Learning for Adults, Marlborough Bldg., Room 306, 383 Holloway Road, London N7 0RN, England (2.50 pounds).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; *Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Ancillary School Services; Dropout Characteristics; Dropout Research; Followup Studies; Foreign Countries; Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; *Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; School Holding Power; *Student Attrition
IDENTIFIERS *England (Hackney)

ABSTRACT

A project invesitgated the current whereabouts of students whose names appeared on adult basic education class registers during October 1986 in Hackney, England. The city was identified by 1981 census data as the most deprived local authority area in England and Wales. Returns were received from 375 students (out of 506 to whom questionnaires were sent). Tutors were asked to record relevant information about the students. Discussions were held with students and tutors. Of the 375 students, 252 had left or moved on; 123 still attended their original class. The external factors in people's lives--work and other commitments-were given most often as the reason for leaving. Factors that affected choices about student progression were fear of failure, finding the right course, and readiness. Links had been created between adult basic education courses and two further education courses designed for "post-basic" literacy students. They showed a fundamental difference between the concept of a "post-basic" literacy student able to learn quickly and the adult basic education student ready to move on after many years of slow progress. Students with learning difficulties were transferred from further education to adult education institutes. Language, literacy, and numeracy support was provided for advanced students in further or higher education courses. Recommendations are made with regard to policy, management, education advice services, staff development, and further research. (16 references) (YLB)

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"... This is a Lifetime Thing"

• Outcomes for Adult Basic Education students from Hackney Adult Education Institute & the Hackney Reading Centre • June 1989 •

Julia Clarke

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"This is a Lifetime Thing":

Outcomes for Adult Basic Education students from Hackney Adult Education Institute and the Hackney Reading Centre

Julia Clarke

Designed by Caroline Page

and produced by the Reprographics Unit at The Polytechnic of North London for ALFA

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to:

* Cal Weatherald from whose ideas the project was developed.
* The Project Steering Group and the individual members (Jud Stone, Irene Schwab, Chris Taylor, Steve Snider and Dhamma Colwell), who spent time with me discussing both their own work and mine.
* Sandra Mendoza, the project administrator, whose support included a willingness to join me in learning about computers as well as taking on many other aspects of the research far beyond a secretarial brief.
* Wendy Moss, ex-colleague, friend and ALFA researcher (1) who provided much-needed support in the early stages and invited me to join her group of "student researchers" at the Lee Centre.
* Julia Rosenak, ex-colleague and friend, who volunteered extensive editorial assistance in her own time, (as did Jud Stone and Irene Schwab).
* All the tutors from Hackney AEI and Hackney Reading Centre who supported me in conducting group discussions in their classes and spent so much of their precious time on the student lists and questionnaires.
* The students and ex-students on whose words this report is based and to whom it is dedicated.

(1) *BREAKING THE BARRIERS - Eight Case Studies of Women Returning to Learning in North London' by Wendy Moss, ALFA/REPLAN (1988).*

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About ALFA

ALFA (Access to Learning for Adults) the North & East London Open College Network links educational providers and organisations in Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Camden, and is mainly concerned with extending and improving access to education for those adults who do not traditionally enter the education system.

There are currently sixteen member organisations in ALFA:-

City and East London College
City of London Polytechnic
City University
Education Advice Service for Islington Adults
Hackney Adult Education Institute
Hackney College
Hackney Education Advice Service
ILEA Careers Service
Islington Adult Education Institute
Kingsway College
Montefiore Community Education Centre
North London College
Polytechnic of North London
Queen Mary College (University of London)
Tower Hamlets Adult Education Institute
Tower Hamlets Education Advice

Member organisations work together through named link people in each organisation in a wide variety of activities. Each activity is planned to meet the needs of adult learners, particularly those who have benefitted least from the system. ALFA's work to date has covered four main areas: the following are examples of the kind of work done.

Information on educational opportunities:

-Details of Access and Return to Learning Courses provided in member institutions and presented in single booklets.

- Directories of all course provision in each institution, presented with the adult student in mind and currently being computerised in 'user-friendly' form.

Curriculum development:

- Courses specifically designed for adult students, making links between different sectors of education.

- Accreditation of Adult Learning: along with the other Open College networks in Inner London, ALFA has developed an Accreditation Unit providing a framework for the accreditation of student learning for the wide range of courses from basic education to preparation for Higher Education where no formal recognition has previously been offered.

Staff development:

-A wide programme of staff training especially designed to improve the quality of offer made to adults in the providing institutions.

Research and development:

-A range of projects which aim to identify good practice, gaps in provision and make recommendations for improvements.

ALFA has now produced a number of Development Project reports. This report "This is a Lifetime Thing" is one of this series of ALFA reports.

For further information about ALFA, the Accreditation Unit and their work, contact

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1. Summary

The research was carried out between April and July 1988. Based largely on direct quotes from students and tutors, this report describes:

1) The way in which many adults, as consumers of educational provision, 'move around' from one class to another, and the variety of factors affecting their choice of class.

2) How people decide to enrol in a class after reaching adulthood without the literacy or numeracy skills they require.

3) The long-term commitment and patience of so many of the students who know that they are learning very slowly.

4) Some of the reasons why adult literacy learning can be such a slow process.

5) The multiplicity of reasons why these students stop attending classes.

6) Current practice in evaluation of student progress.

7) Educational advice available to students who are ready to 'move on'.

8) Issues which arise in considering progression from Adult Basic Education to Further Education College courses and a list of possible 'progression routes' for further evaluation.

Central to this report is a picture of the long-term nature of adult literacy learning. Some of the issues involved - the competing demands of social and economic pressures, previous negative experiences, teacher expectations and the use of labels like 'Learning Difficulties' - are touched on in this report.

But the responses to questions asked in the course of this research generated further questions which require more research. This report maps out the territory and points to an agenda for further discussion and for a serious examination of the context in which adult students see their learning as a 'lifetime thing'.

2. The Context

1. The Borough

Hackney was identified by the Department of Environment as the most deprived local authority area in England and Wales, using data from the 1981 Census. The area has a particularly high unemployment rate, 31.6% overall and as high as 90% for young black people living on certain housing estates...44% of the people living in Hackney are black or from other ethnic minorities.

2. The Students

Most of the basic education students in Hackney are unemployed. The students range in age from 14 to 80. Around 75% of the students are Afro-Caribbean and some students are from other ethnic minorities.

3. Hackney Adult Education Institute

Hackney AEI has a programme of classes in branches and in community centres all over Hackney, in the broad areas of Access, Art, English as a Second Language, Literacy, Numeracy, P.E. and Textiles. The AEI has offered Literacy and Numeracy classes for about twelve years. More recently, the provision has included courses such as 'Fresh Start for Women', 'Maths for Study' and 'Wider Opportunities' which aim to serve as a next step for basic education students as well as a point of entry for adults returning to education after a long break. Most of the classes are taught by part-time tutors. 40% of these are black or from ethnic minorities. Volunteer tutors work in some classes and also help to provide 1:1 home tuition for housebound students.

4. Hackney Reading Centre

The Hackney Reading Centre (HRC) is a basic education project situated within Centerprise, a community centre which also houses a coffee bar, bookshop, publishing project, advice centre and other services. Centerprise has a shopfront building on a busy High Street in Dalston and is used by a wide variety of the local community.

The Reading Centre has been in existence for 14 years offering literacy and, more recently, also numeracy, to adult students. It is funded through City and East London College and close links are maintained with the College. During the period covered by this research, a 'College Links' course was running, in which students from the Reading Centre also attended college for part of an 'Adult Foundation Course'. One of the full-time workers at The Reading Centre also teaches at the college. There are 3 part-time tutors and volunteers assist in all classes. The Reading Centre runs a 4-week

summer scheme after the end of the college and AEI terms in July as well as occasional subject-based short courses.

3. *The Project*

The proposal for this research project was submitted to ALFA by the Hackney Adult Literacy Development Group (HALDAG), a consortium of Adult Basic Education providers in Hackney. A steering group was established with representatives from HALDAG and also from Hackney College and City & East London College. With a working title of 'Exits and Destinations', the aims of the original proposal were to find out what happens to students after they enrol in Adult Basic Education classes. Within this broad area of enquiry, the original idea was to focus the research on the experience of students in two contrasting settings. After reproducing the original research proposal below, I give an account of my own professional background and of the development of Adult Basic Education from work in Adult Literacy. I explain why, after discussions with students, tutors and members of the Steering Group, I changed the focus of the research.

Exits and Destinations: Basic Education Proposal

1. Background

The current Tertiary reorganisation within ILEA has demonstrated the importance of highlighting the specific needs of adults in community, adult and further education. With the possible diminution of specific provision for adults, effective links between the sectors becomes more necessary; we need to understand the reasons why some types of provision are more successful than others and to identify the barriers to access perceived by those students who make use of the current provision. While there are a number of research and development projects looking into Access provision and routes into HE, very little has been done for students who are at the beginning of the educational chain - literacy and numeracy students. An evaluation of the current provision and perceptions of staff and students involved in two contrasting settings would enable us to draw conclusions about good practice and to make recommendations.

2. Proposal

2.1 To follow up students in Basic Education classes, in two contrasting settings, on a case study basis, to identify

i) Exits and destinations of students.

ii) Factors affecting choice of destination, e.g. counselling and advice available to students.

2.2 The two settings, an Adult Education Institute and a voluntary centre would provide insights into different provision, different procedures and perceptions of alternative forms of education provision, teaching methods, staffing. Interviews with staff would form an integral part of the project.

The Researcher

I first began work in adult literacy in 1974 as a volunteer in a new scheme in a community education centre, funded by Goldsmiths College but with the same degree of autonomy that HRC enjoys in relation to City & East London College. I have subsequently worked as a teacher or youth worker in the provision of Adult Basic Education in F.E.Colleges, Adult Education Institutes, in voluntary schemes, youth unemployment projects, YTS schemes and for a Trades Union education project.

While much of my teaching has been on the open-ended student-negotiated model of most Adult Literacy work, I have devised and taught courses of determinate length, with varying degrees of constraint on timing and curricula. In the three years before this research I was working on the development of Adult Basic Education in the context of workplace training.I have therefore had the opportunity before I began this research to explore the practical implications of a variety of approaches in Adult Basic Education. I have often changed my practice and my beliefs in the light of this experience.

I lived in Hackney for ten years and worked at Hackney Reading Centre for five years. I have also worked for Hackney College as a part-time tutor on several different courses. While I was naturally familiar with many of the people, the places and the work that was going on, I had been working away from Hackney for three years and approached the research with an open mind.

Adult Basic Education

'Adult Basic Education' describes work which is developing from the more limited 'Adult Literacy' provision of the 1970s. While the core of ABE provision is the literacy class, literacy teaching requires content and literacy students often want to develop skills in numeracy or other aspects of communication as well as to follow up a range of interests. The student-centred style of most adult literacy teaching has led tutors and organisers to respond to students' needs and intentions by extending their original brief.

The term 'ABE' also acknowledges that the teaching approaches developed in the field of adult literacy are appropriate to many adults who already have basic literacy skills. These would

include students who need to work in a small group at their own pace before taking the risk of joining a 'course' where there would be the danger, perhaps, of re-living the shame and failure of previous 'educational' experience.

ABE may include Numeracy, 'Fresh Start' and 'linked skills' (e.g. literacy/dressmaking, spelling/word-processing), ABE courses may be run from all kinds of Adult and Further Education Colleges and Institutes or Voluntary schemes as well as being integrated into 'Open Learning' packages or 'Employment Training'.

The danger inherent in this attempt to meet the needs of a wide range of students under a single 'ABE' umbrella, is that of concentrating on those whose needs are more easily accommodated at the expense of those who need more long-term, flexible provision. Remarkable progress can be achieved, for example, where a woman who has devoted years to manual work, both paid and unpaid, is then given the opportunity to resume her education and gain a new confidence in her own intellectual ability. Opportunities for re-training are also terribly important and, where early schooling has been forgotten through lack of use, it is appropriate to include an 'ABE' component in vocational training.

But most of the students I met in the course of this research are *literacy* students - people who have reached adulthood with very limited skills in reading and writing. The literacy classes at both Hackney AEI and the Reading Centre have an open curriculum and students may come for a few weeks or for several years. Many of the students will take many, many years to achieve independent literacy - the skills *and confidence* needed to fill in a form or read a letter. Many are also adults for whom long and 'unsocial' working hours, family commitments and/or ill-health can lead to erratic attendance and difficulties in concentrating, retaining new learning or even staying awake for two hours.

Planning and evaluation can be difficult in this context and it is not easy for a tutor to sustain the kind of energy and enthusiasm year after year which is needed to stimulate real learning and ensure that progress is made and is recognised by both student and tutor. Attempts are being made through schemes involving the compilation of portfolios, or 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' to provide tangible measures of learning for ABE students. Even such flexible measures are, however, externally defined. Charnley & Jones(1), in reviewing the move from Adult Literacy to Adult Basic Education, conclude,

> "..a narrow concentration on skills, whether in the three Rs or in so-called 'life-skills', may be seriously misdirected if by that term is meant cognitive and enactive achievements, or behavioural objectives externally defined. The starting point and the guidelines must be found in the potential students' own views of themselves."

This is why my research into outcomes for Adult Basic Education students concentrated on gathering their views and assessing the context in which they are learning. The investigation has left me with a renewed respect for the students and tutors who have taken on the enormous struggle of learning to read and write in adulthood. This work has to be validated on its own terms. Instead of feeling embarrassed by these students' real needs, or trying to ignore them, we need the backing of further research into adult learning which will support responsive, caring and open-ended approaches in adult basic education.

Two Contrasting Settings?

While the research proposal was to compare aspects of the provision in two contrasting settings, this very soon seemed inappropriate for two reasons. First, in contrast with some of the courses which comprised possible 'progression routes' in Further Education Colleges, the classes at Hackney Reading Centre and in the AEI were very similar to each other. Secondly, I was asked to concentrate this research on the experience of the students and tutors, not on overall administration or management. One would expect to find that the AEI, being such a large institution with so many sites, may not be able to provide the kind of supportive base in the community which, with its High Street location, as part of Centerprise bookshop and coffee bar is such an important part of the HRC offer. This was not what I found.

When I refer to a supportive base, I mean a place where students can feel comfortable in learning, where they know they will find sympathetic help with other day to day problems which crop up in their lives - dealing with children's schools, the local Housing Department, the official world in general. The other important element is the long-term nature of this support. This was shown in the students' confidence that the tutors and the class will still be there for them if they go away (to work, on a college course, to have a baby) and come back again. It was also reflected in tutors' comments on students,

> "Oh, yes, I saw her in the market last week and she told me she's working at.."

> "He pops in every now and then.."

One of the classes I visited was an AEI evening class at Woodberry Down School. A 1960s concrete and glass comprehensive which closed down quite recently and is now occupied by both the AEI and Hackney College. It is obvious that no money is being spent on maintenance and the grounds

(1) *"The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy", A.H.Charnley and H.A.Jones, ALBSU (1979) p.185*

have an air of dereliction already, grass and weeds growing through the concrete paving, boards over ground floor windows. The class was held in a hut behind the 'RoSLA block', the very name reminding us of the beginning of an era of confusion and doubt in education ,(1) which was a prefabricated hut in the corner of the school grounds. All its timbers were rotting. And yet inside this hut was a class with the same relaxed atmosphere as I had found in the warm and cosy room at Centerprise. This was the class in which Barbara(2), one of the students said,

"As long as the teacher's here I'll keep on coming."

It was therefore agreed with members of the steering group that I should alter the brief from a comparison between provision in two settings to an enquiry into the perceptions of students and tutors in both settings.

Outcomes - The Eventual Brief

Since the research project was confined to a four month period, it would not have been possible to conduct the kind of longitudinal case study implied in the original proposal. So, after further discussions with members of the Steering Group, we agreed on the following strategies:

i) In order to discover the whole range of possible outcomes for ABE students, I would conduct a survey of the current whereabouts of students who appeared on ABE class registers from October 1986 (2 years previously) in Hackney Reading Centre and the Adult Education Institute. This survey would be based on information supplied by tutors.

ii) In order to discover what kinds of factors affect these outcomes I would hold discussions with as many current and ex-students as possible, individually and in groups. Some of those I spoke to would also be represented in the statistical survey. But these student groups would include those who had joined or re-joined classes after October 1986 so no attempt would be made to match the statistics to those I spoke with.

iii) I would carry out an investigation into possible progression routes for ABE students by talking to staff responsible for appropriate courses in local Colleges of Further Education.

iv) I would assess current practice in evaluating student progress and in educational counselling by means of a postal questionnaire to all ABE tutors in the AEI and Hackney Reading Centre.

(1) *"RoSLA" = "Raising of the School Leaving Age"*
(2) *All students' names have been changed to preserve confidentiality*

As I have noted above in the Summary of this report, many issues emerged in the course of this research which deserve a much more thorough investigation than I have been able to include. I hope that this report might serve as an agenda for further research.

4. *Methodology*

The research brief outlined in the previous chapter was one which evolved in the course of the enquiry. The Project Steering Group had agreed that students should participate in the research but it was left to me to devise appropriate ways of effecting this participation. There was an expectation that I should be able to find out what happens to students from ABE classes when they join FE College Courses. I only had time to make a small start on this aspect of the research into 'destinations'. I very soon realised that the diversity in principles and practice even within the same F.E. College (on different sites) would mean that a few meetings would not be enough to establish a clear picture on which I could report.

I set out to discover the nature of an ongoing process and became involved in a dynamic and interactive exercise. Discussions with a group tutor would lead me to make contact with an ex-student; issues which arose in one group discussion were introduced to a second group; attendance at a staff meeting would produce more suggestions of people to see, classes to visit, outcomes to explore. While waiting for questionnaires to be returned, I fitted in meetings and discussions with those individuals and groups who were most easily accessible to me. Expedience was thus the criterion for selection and there are significant ommissions, some of which are detailed below. With so much to investigate and so little time in which to do it I used a variety of approaches in order to get as broad a picture as possible of the experiences of those involved.

a) Statistical Survey/Tutor Reports

Using micro-computers and a software package (dBase III+) I began the research by creating a data structure and writing programs in order to carry out a survey of the destinations of all students who were enrolled in basic education classes in both HRC and the AEI during October 1986.

This involved over 1000 register entries (since many students attend several classes) for a total of 506 students. Returns were received for 375 students - 310 from Hackney AEI and 65 from Hackney Reading Centre (see fig.i). Most of the data entry was done by the Project Administrator who

Fig. i
THE TARGET GROUP

	HRC	AEI	Total
Total register entries for ABE classes, October 1986	170	897	1067
Total number of individual students, attending one or more classes	69	437	506
Information on individual students returned by tutors	65	310	375

Target group = 506
Respondents = 375

Fig. i (a)
NUMBER OF CLASSES ATTENDED

Of the 375 students from the target group, for whom replies were received, 68% were enrolled for more than one class per week.

Number of classes	*Number of students per week* HRC	AEI	Total
one	24	97	121
two	23	140	163
three	7	37	44
four	6	31	37
five or more	4	6	10

also took on the bulk of the work involved in chasing up tutors for completed lists.

Adult Basic Education tutors, whether full-time or part-time, usually work far more hours than they are paid for. In addition to teaching, preparation, counselling and pastoral work on behalf of their students, many are also working on materials development and attending meetings and training courses. For this reason, while asking tutors for information about students, we had to keep the demands to a minimum. We worked on the assumption that if tutors were asked specific questions about students, they would be likely to want to ensure the accuracy of the information. They would put the questionnaires aside with a view to asking a previous tutor, checking with a full-timer, ringing up so-and-so who might remember that student...and we might get them back in a years time!

Fig.ii
Questionnaire for Statistical Survey

AEI32
ALFA RESEARCH CONFIDENTIAL
Below is a list of students who were on the register for this class during the autumn term 1986
Under each name, please will you write down any information you think would be relevant about the student's current attendance- whether they are still attending, whether they attend other classes, reasons given for leaving or suggestions as to how we might be able to contact them...

241FCH497 SMITH, JOHN _ _ _ _ _ _ _
_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

213FCH498 MACDONALD, MARY _ _ _ _
_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

So we just sent a list of names of students who had been in the class two years ago with a blank space under each name. We asked tutors to record, briefly, any information which they considered relevant about the student's current attendance - whether they were still attending, whether they attend other classes, reasons for leaving or suggestions as to how we might be able to contact them...

Our 'target group' therefore consisted of the 375 students for whom we received replies. The chapter on 'Outcomes' in this report is based on the information received in this way.

I describe below how my discussions with ex-students led me to conclude that discrepancies will occur in 'reasons for leaving' given by the tutor or by the student. We also found several instances where, for example, a student had attended two different classes and the tutor of one class reported that the student was 'still attending' while the other tutor reported that the student had left because they found a job. The Chapter on 'Students as Consumers' illustrates these patterns of attendance but the statistical part of this research does not include a full analysis of such complexity.

The most valuable and interesting part of the returns has proved to be the tutors' comments. These are included throughout this report alongside the comments from students transcribed from group discussions.

b) Discussions with Education Workers

i) Hackney Adult Education Institute and Hackney Reading Centre

I met with the Organisers, attended staff meetings and met with many tutors on different sites all over the borough.

ii) Further Education Colleges

In the course of this research I began to look at possible destinations for those basic education students wanting to "move on". I met with several course tutors from the two local FE colleges - City and East London College and Hackney College - both of which include 'Adult Foundation' and 'Return to study' in their provision on several sites all over Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets.

iii) Hackney Adult Literacy Development Group (HALDAG)

I attended a meeting of this group with representatives from various Centres offering Adult Basic Education in Hackney.

iv) Hackney Education Advice Service (HEAS)

I visited this organisation, housed in a prefab. in the playground of yet another of Hackney's redundant secondary schools. I was told that, although they receive very few requests for Adult Basic Education, many people come in and ask about vocational courses but are found not to have the required standard of literacy or numeracy skills. These people are usually referred to the AEI or HRC.

The HEAS workers told me that they would respond to invitations to Adult Basic Education classes to explain the service to students or offer advice on particular courses. My tutor questionnaire (see below) was designed partly to assess the extent to which tutors were aware of this service.

v) Special Needs

Hackney AEI has a lecturer responsible for all students with Special Needs. If a person is unable to learn because they are physically unable to get to a class, or because they need special equipment in order to overcome an auditory or visual disability for example, their Special Need will be met when these obstacles are removed so that they can make use of mainstream provision. There is a literacy class at Hackney Reading Centre, however, which is for students with Learning Difficulties but which is publicised as a 'Special Needs' group.

The use of the label, 'people with Learning Difficulties' in place of 'the mentally handicapped' marks a radical change in attitude where the emphasis is on *people* first. There are educational needs which are common to adults who are just beginning to live away from an institution, learning about socially acceptable behaviour or struggling to co-ordinate hand movements in order to communicate. Many of these adults will attend Basic Education classes and Hackney AEI also has a lecturer with responsibility for students with Learning Difficulties. I met with this lecturer and with a course tutor engaged in similar work at Hackney College.

c) Discussions with Students

I began the project with a plan to involve students in conducting interviews and arranged with a tutor at Hackney Reading Centre to work with the women's literacy class on this. I drafted a list of questions covering three broad areas of enquiry:

a) How did the students first get to the class?
b) Experiences of other classes, assessment of current learning.
c) How did students see the future?

It proved a useful experience and I visited this group again since some of the students were also attending the 'College Links' course. What I hadn't allowed for was the way that the students being interviewed wanted to help their interviewers. All the attention was focussed on the practical task of spelling out each word, or the interviewer re-phrasing the replies to fit her idea of a 'proper sentence' or to accommodate her spelling limitations. I therefore decided that, for such a short-term project, a broader view would be achieved by recording students' responses to questions in more loosely structured discussion groups.

The eight groups chosen were those whose tutors volunteered to work with me after I presented the project to staff meetings at the AEI and HRC. I thus heard the views of 48 students, 37 women and 11 men aged between 17 and 70 in the following groups:

HRC - Women's literacy class
HRC - evening literacy class
AEI - morning literacy class at the Lauriston Centre
AEI - afternoon literacy class at the Lauriston Centre
AEI - morning class at Chelmer Road (2 groups together)
AEI - morning literacy class at Kingsland School
AEI - evening literacy class at Woodberry Down School
AEI - mother's group with creche at Comet Parents' Centre

I began each discussion by explaining what the research was about and inviting questions. Most of the questioners were concerned about confidentiality. I assured everybody that their contributions would be anonymous. I have used fictitious names for all students mentioned in this report. There was also a lot of interest in who this research was for. I expressed the hope that it will be of use to anybody involved in the provision of Adult Basic Education, including Further and Higher Education and that I should try to ensure that the views expressed by students in these discussions were central to the report.

Discussions were based on the original questionnaire (see fig. iii), and after each session I sent a

Fig.iii
STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

ALFA RESEARCH	QUESTIONS
1.	Why did you decide to come to classes?
2.	Was this the first place you came to?
3.	Can you describe, in detail, the first time you came here?
4.	How long have you been coming? How often do you come?
5.	What can you do now that you couldn't do before you came to classes?
6.	How do you think you learn best?
7.	Have you been to any other adult classes?
8.	a) If you answered yes to question 7: Can you say as much as possible about the other classes (What was it like when you first went there, how was it different from this class...?)
	b) If you answered no to question 7: Have you thought of going to other classes? What might stop you going?
9.	How long do you think you will want to keep coming here?
10.	What do you think you might do when you stop coming here?

full transcript back to the class. I believe that some tutors were able to use these as material for reading and further discussion.

d) Discussions with Ex-Students

I visited four ex-students in their homes: This experience illustrates the fact that it is not practicable to follow 'student progression' retrospectively. I also learnt from these home visits that in every case there would be discrepancies between the different accounts related by the tutor and the student. It is important to bear this in mind throughout this report and it means that all the statistics in this research can be no more than a rough guide since all the students confronted in their own homes refused to be categorised in any way!

For example, a tutor suggested that I visit Lucille, who had started at HRC with very limited literacy skills and had progressed to a college course. However, when I went to see Lucille, she told me that she had attended an AEI class many years ago, before starting at HRC and that even then she had already been able to fill in forms and read letters. She had completed her schooling in the West Indies and felt insulted at the suggestion that she had not learnt to read and write at school. Lucille said she began to attend classes because her reading was not as fluent as she had wanted and her spelling was 'not that good'.

e) Tutor Questionnaire

After visiting HEAS and many of the classes, I devised a questionnaire for tutors in order to get some idea of current practice in the area of evaluation and educational guidance. The questionnaires (see fig.iv overleaf) were brief and most questions asked for 'yes' or 'no' answers.

Over fifty questionnaires were sent out towards the end of the summer term and there was no time to chase up replies. Four of the fifteen returned were from Hackney Reading Centre tutors. It is likely that of the other eleven, most of them anonymous, the majority were from tutors who work full-time or who work enough hours to be able to attend staff meetings and generally keep in touch with each other. There is still enough diversity in the replies to give us some idea of how tutors view the issue of progress and progression for their students.

f) Omissions

Many aspects of this subject have been omitted from the research for lack of time. The most serious of these have been:

a) 'The Basement', Nevill Road (North London Education Project)

I met several students who also attend classes at 'The Basement' and others in the target group are reported to have moved on to classes there. In looking at both 'students as consumers' and at the destinations of students from the target group I am aware that this omission means the true picture is even broader and more complex than the one I am presenting.

b) AEI Part-time tutors

Although I met some of these, most of those whose classes I visited were either full-time or were employed for substantial hours in the week. It would have been useful to hear more from the many tutors who teach for fewer hours in more isolated sites as I believe this would expose a wider variety of practice, particularly in the area of evaluation and progression.

c) Numeracy

Although many students in the target group and some of those I met attend both literacy and numeracy classes, I was not able to make a separate

Fig.iv
TUTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT PROGRESSION

Many thanks to those who have already filled in the student record sheets which we sent out a few weeks ago. I am sorry to be making yet another demand at such a busy time of year, but it would help me enormously in my research if you can find a few minutes to fill in this final questionnaire. If you find it takes you longer than five minutes, please return it half-done rather than put it away to do "some other time". All replies will be treated as confidential and names will be detached from any contributions used.

1. Please tick which of the following methods you use to evaluate/assess your students' progress:

   Informal discussion with students:
   As a group ____ Individually___
   Discussion with colleagues ___

   Written records:
   During each class ___
   After each class ___
   More than termly ___
   Once a term ___
   Once a year ___
   Other methods: ___

2. Do you give educational guidance to your students?

3. Who would you ask for information about courses?

4. Are there any particular courses you have recommended for your students?

5. Do you know about the Hackney Education Advice Service?

   Do you know where it is?

   Do you know what they provide?

   Would you consider inviting an education advice worker to visit your class?

   (Any comments?)

6. If you were paid for one session (say, 3 hours) per year to work on helping students "move on" from each class, how would you use the time?

study of those students who enrol for numeracy classes only. Numeracy provision in Adult Education has grown out of a demand from literacy students but it is becoming evident that there is an enormous need for numeracy classes, nationally, among potential students whose literacy skills are quite adequate. Our target group included students in numeracy classes and it is clear that these students have a far wider range of educational achievement than those in literacy classes. Some numeracy students are also beginner readers while some are qualified teachers! Much of the numeracy provision caters for students who are following courses in Further and Higher Education or who have specific vocational goals.

When I met with the ILEA Adult Numeracy Co-ordinator she was concerned about the gap between the practical numeracy which is based on adult experience and deals with money, measurements etc., and the kinds of mathematics required for vocational tests and exams, (fractions, long-division etc.). The language is different and even some of the concepts. She expressed the hope that this research would provide an opportunity to investigate the practical implications which this issue has for student progression.

I believe that there are parallel issues for literacy students and much could be learnt from a longitudinal study of the outcomes for numeracy students from our 1986 target group. A proposal for this study is included in the recommendations at the end of this report.

5.
Students as Consumers

One might expect that, since reading and writing are among the first things taught in schools, an adult basic education student is entering on the first rung of a ladder which can only be followed in one direction - upwards. The experience of this research shows this to be an utterly false assumption. I found that adult students tend to use their local educational provision in very much the same way as one would use a public transport system. By bus or train, by bicycle or on foot, there are many ways of reaching a destination in a city. We are restricted in our choices by money, time, physical ability to use the service or knowledge of what is available. But these restrictions are not constant and, as needs change or new routes are discovered, the consumer will make different choices. And, of course, the destinations will keep changing too.

Many adults who are not satisfied with their literacy and/or numeracy skills may well have acquired knowledge and skills in other areas and seek help only for literacy or numeracy. But the

majority of the students I met, both in groups and individually, had come into Adult Education through a desire for Education in a much wider, if as yet undefined, sense.

The location of a literacy class within a broader ABE department opens up the possibility of progression within the same department from, for example, general literacy to a 'Return to Learning' course. There are a growing number of linked skills courses where literacy and numeracy teaching are integrated with the teaching of other skills.

What I had not previously been aware of, was the extent to which Adult Basic Education students are quite capable of selecting appropriate courses for themselves, creating their own 'links' and, by enrolling for a variety of classes, constructing their own 'General Education' course.

Paul lives in Hoxton but attends a literacy class a long way from his home because there was a range of classes in the same building and,

> "I could do it all in one hit, like! All the other classes are practical - this is the only mental stimulation I get."

The statistical survey for this research was based only on registers for ABE classes. But we know that many students attending these classes are also attending classes in other departments of the AEI such as Cake Decorating, Photography and Pottery. Many are also attending other centres such as 'The Basement', and at AEIs in other boroughs. There are also many students who attend both AEI or HRC classes who are also following courses at Further Education Colleges or vocational training courses elsewhere.

Tutors are not always aware of the fact that their students attend many other classes. I suspect that sometimes this is because students may feel guilty of disloyalty if they admit to it, especially if it is another ABE class. When I visited George, an ex-student, we discussed the idea of George trying a different literacy class. As we looked through the list, George said of one class,

> "I hear Rosie speak about it and it not much good."

Rosie was a student who attended HRC classes for six or seven years before trying out classes in the AEI, at The Basement and other places as well.

Many factors contribute to the choice of a class. A good relationship with a tutor may be worth a long journey. For a student unable to travel, the choice will be limited to the classes available locally.

I visited an ex-student, Gloria, whose first contact with adult education was while attending Hackney Hospital as an out-patient,

> "My sickness was a nerves problem..I used to go to Hackney Hospital and do knitting and things like that. And they use to have posters on the wall. I needed a little help with my knitting and another patient showed me the poster - something about knitting where I could go, in Stoke Newington, The Old Fire Station.. and the tutor there, she did knitting and crocheting as well. She told me she did a class down in Chelmer Road as well. So I went there too and then I saw these booklets about the college. I thought I would like to go and do something different. So I went back to ...where the Hackney College office is...then I went back to Chelmer Road and did some maths test and things like that and then they said I can go and do the Adult Foundation Class in Ayrsome Road.."

After a year on the Adult Foundation course, Gloria said she became ill again and could not travel that far. So she enrolled, in 1986, in an AEI literacy class near her home at Chelmer Road, and was thus included in the target group for this project. The literacy tutor encouraged Gloria to attend a numeracy class at Kingsland School which he also taught and Gloria was later accepted for a place on the 'Family & Community Care' course at Chelmer Road (Hackney College). Ill-health intervened again so that Gloria was not able to take up this full-time place and, instead, she went back to Ayrsome Road to do a part-time 'Business Studies Course' (a part of the Adult Foundation Course). She had just completed a year on this course when I saw her and was waiting for the results of some exams she had sat.

This is just one example of the many factors which come into play when students choose a class or course. It appeared that Gloria had considered the 'Family & Community Care' course because it was local and at an appropriate educational level rather than because she had a particular interest in the vocational direction of such a course. She switched to Business Studies because, unable to attend full-time, the part-time course was also at the right level for her and at a college site where Gloria had been before.

It would be interesting to discover the reasons behind the choices made by these students,

> "Used to attend sporadically. No longer attends maths class but attends literacy class at Kingsland."

> "Has stopped coming but is taking a course in Dressmaking at William Patten."

Literacy classes often fulfil important needs beyond the acquisition of skills. This comment from a tutor is typical of many,

> "C. still attends regularly twice a week without fail since Sep. '85. Depends v.heavily on class for social gain and badly needs literacy skills."

A literacy class may suit some students who have no difficulty with reading and writing, like this student whose tutor wrote,

"OAP with no literacy problems - reads James Joyce - attends Art and Keep Fit classes too..enjoys stimulus of reading etc. with other students.."

Achievements through adult education generally cannot always be attributed to just one class. In the course of a group discussion, Buchi told me how her daughter had persuaded her to come to the literacy class, the conversation continued:

Buchi: ..and now my daughter takes me to Keep Fit. When I went there first I said "No, I'm not going", but she say, "Come on Mum", and I went. And at first I was so ashamed and now every week she say, "You're coming Mum".

Me: So you're getting fit as well as clever.

Buchi: Oh yes, and now I can do something for myself. When I go to the bank I can write my cheque.."

In the discussion of learning which appears later, students articulate ways in which acquiring the courage to attempt a task is as important as, and sometimes more important than, acquiring the technical skills to complete it. Buchi seemed to be saying that it was the combination of the two which helped her take this important step towards independent literacy.

So how do students find out about available routes? My first questions in the group discussions were about how and why people first came to that particular class.

A Leaflet through the Door

A very common pattern, related in one form or another by about a third of the 48 students I spoke to, was that they had been thinking about classes for a long time and a 'leaflet' (AEI prospectus) came through their door at the right point in their lives.

"I wish, without thinking, I wish something like that would happen to me and then, well I say it's about time..and then I came here and find out about it.."

Barbara said that she hadn't bothered in her previous job because there was no writing involved. But when she got promoted she had to write,

"..so when the leaflet came through the door - well, I'd been thinking about it.."

Long Gaps

Many of the students had been to other classes before, but sometimes for short periods and with long gaps in between.

"I used to go to Upton House - I did take it when they did advertise 'On the Move'* but this one I couldn't do it good because I was working, but now I'm not working..I did go after work in the evenings but it was too rushy for me so I left it two years or so, but now I'm very pleased I come."

I think it is worth noting the long periods which can elapse between attempts at even beginning a class:

"..,my daughter phone for me and they give me Skinners School, down the Lower School and we went there but there is no class, nobody there so I didn't bother going there any more - that was about six years ago."

This student eventually started at HRC five years later.

"Certain Things Is Not Right"

Few students expressed any specific aims in joining the class beyond, "I wanted reading and writing". Most spoke in terms of the skills they didn't have:

"Well, I had problems with reading, spelling, that kind of thing."

"I went down the dole and they want to see me round the other side so I told them I would like to refresh my brain because certain things is not right, you know, and I would like to catch up.."

Work

This lack of skills was often exposed at work:

"Well, it happened to me that I was working for the Council..I was working there for a long time and then one of the fellows he offer me the job as a foreman and I was so embarrassed..I felt a bit ashamed to tell him that I can't read and write, so I just refused to take the job."

Some students had been referred to these ABE classes after completing a 20 week workplace course for Hackney Council employees. One student was among the many referred through the 'Restart' programme (although I was told that only 4% of these referrals to Hackney AEI led to students actually attending classes).

Dependency

Another motivating factor for many students was that they did not like being dependent on other people,

"I decided to come to classes since I cannot read at all. I know one or two letters but I did not know how to put them together. It was so boring sometimes when I have a letter to write back home and I cannot do it. I have to depend on my family them to write it. So I decide to come."

Independence and privacy are issues which arise frequently later on when we moved on to a discussion of aims and aspirations.

* *'On The Move' was the BBC TV programme which launched the Adult Literacy Campaign in 1975.*

"To Speak Up More"

It is also at a later point in the discussions that many students mention the confidence they have gained in oral as well as written communication. One student includes this as a reason for coming to a class in the first place,

> "I originally came to better my English, reading and writing and to speak up more for myself because I've always been a very quiet person anyway and the more you talk the better it is for you."

A New Idea

For one student, the prospectus alone sparked off her interest,

> "I see it in one of those newsletters. I didn't think about it before but when I read it you know I thinks it's a good idea because I want to catch up on my words because..when I write a letter it takes so long and I make so much mistakes and I need to spell a word..sometimes a word just bob up in my mind and I can't know which word to put down. Now since I'm here I find more confidence in myself."

Time to Spare

For others, unemployment (sometimes through chronic illness), retirement, or a reduction in domestic commitments has led them to think about Adult Education and a Literacy class was one of the many options,

> "For the past two years I have been trying to take a course in cake decorating, and I wanted something very near to home. So I did try and when the time came it was booked up. So I decided to come here to refresh my memory in English and everything which I intend to take something very seriously..like business studies, next year maybe..I am taking computering very seriously.."

> "When I first came somebody bring me because I was in the house. I retire already. She tell me come. I can't read and I can't write so as I came here I feel much better... When I come to this country I was working and I didn't have time to come to school."

A First Step

There was one student who saw the literacy class as the first step towards vocational studies,

> "..I came here because I feel fed up..I could read and write and spell but sometimes I forget words. I went to school in this country so have an idea what it is but I would like to go to college and I would like to study something. Because when I left school I was doing typing and I like that.."

For another student, the idea of moving on to college seems to have arisen since she joined the class,

> "I started coming to this class to improve my spelling. I'm a bit alright in reading but spelling is quite difficult but I've been catching on and it's quite helpful to come here. I'm thinking of doing more education - business studies - possibly next yearif I can.."

Many students come to literacy and numeracy classes while attending Further or even Higher Education Colleges. Others come to these classes *after* completing, or failing to complete such courses. Some of their accounts are included in Chapter 6, 'Progress & Progression'.

It was quite clear from these discussions that there are as many routes leading to an ABE class as there are routes on for those who leave. Movement between classes and courses tends to be very fluid. While there is no clear pattern of progression up any kind of educational ladder, this certainly does not mean that students are standing still. These students assess their own achievements in terms which challenge conventional notions of educational 'progression'. Adult Literacy tutors in the 1970s soon recognised that assessments of reading skills based on children's 'reading ages' were not appropriate for adults. Similarly, it must be recognised that progression through Adult Education cannot be equated with the kinds of measurements applied to a child's progress through school. The confidence and self-respect gained through successful acquisition of even very limited literacy skills may well provide the impetus for a student to branch out into creative or vocational areas which may not, in themselves, require these skills.

When I asked Paul whether the other classes he attended were as important as the reading and writing,he replied,

> "Yes, because I done some magical things, even here, in that room there I done some painting. I didn't expect anything out of it. I just done it for the love of it and it builds up my confidence as well doing things like that."

6.
"This is a Lifetime Thing"

In the course of the research carried out by Charnley & Jones (op. cit) based on a sample of 68 Adult Literacy students, the authors estimated that about a quarter of the sample comprised students who might be regarded as having special educational needs. This group would include those who had been labelled 'ESN' at school, those who had specific learning difficulties or those with a physical handicap (partially sighted, partially hearing, etc.).

While maintaining that this substantial number of people, "must always be remembered in any consideration of the problem of literacy", Charnley & Jones then decide to leave them out of their concluding chapter on criteria of achievement. These criteria are based on the assumption that, "the majority of students were normal people who, in groups, sharing experience with tutors and fellow students, found a new confidence which enriched their social relationships..."

So who is normal? It seems to me that, in our sincere efforts to champion the right to educational provision for 'normal' people who have reached adulthood unable to read and write, there is a danger of creating false divisions and suggesting that progress for 'normal' literacy students should be evaluated by different criteria from those used in evaluating progress for adults with Learning Difficulties.

About one third of the students in our target group were still attending the original class after two years.(see fig.v) Some are reported to have been attending for eight years or more. But it can be seen in the reports of 'reasons for leaving' that students often have competing demands on their time and resources and leave for all kinds of reasons unrelated to their progress. From the tutors' comments it is clear that students come and go, leave one class and join that class or another later on, sometimes after a gap of many years.

It is therefore impossible to put a precise figure on the numbers of students who will need to spend five to ten years working on basic literacy skills. From my class meetings I would guess that they form the largest category of students, comprising between one third to one half of the students in literacy classes. These are the real literacy students.

About a third of the students are those who can already read and write but for whom the teaching approach in a literacy class has been appropriate to their needs at the time. Most of the progression to college courses will be by students from this group. Also, a significant number of students attending college courses come to literacy or numeracy classes for extra support, or join an ABE class *after* completing a college course.

One or two exceptional students from our original target group may have arrived at an ABE class barely able to read and write and then left after a year or two with the literacy skills needed to follow an 'Adult Foundation Course' at an FE College. These would tend to be young adults who have somehow had little or no experience of school or of educational failure.

There is another minority who are unlikely to ever achieve the literacy skills needed to attend to their own correspondence or read a newspaper. But these could only be identified in retrospect and cannot be counted.

For most literacy students, the goals they have set themselves will take many, many years to achieve. After several years in a literacy class, some of these students consider the possibility of moving on to a college course, often as a result of the efforts made by tutors who are trying to establish tangible routes for progression.

Of course the goals that people set themselves will change as their eyes are opened to new possibilities, but these replies to my question, "How long will you keep coming?" are quite typical,

> "As long as life lasts. I don't know what I'll do after that but I'll keep coming to learn more and more different things - but after I finished I don't know what I want to do."

> "..I want to write myself and when I get a letter from someone, I want to be able to read it myself..I won't leave it 'til I'm capable of living myself the life I want."

These are 'normal' people, of whom the following comments by tutors are typical,

> "Regular attender, one evening per week - over 5 years - getting on O.K."

> "Started in '84. Needs basic literacy help with particular focus on letters and forms. Can now read a book and feels she has learned a lot. Slow but consistent progress."

In every class which I visited, listening to students talking about their own learning, I was overwhelmed by the patience and dedication of people who were quite clear about the fact that they had embarked on a very, very long-term process.

What the students are saying here is of central importance to any discussion of 'progression' for ABE students.

"It's A Big Mountain To Climb"

Arthur, an elderly student, described this long, slow process,

> "A tutor and a class, it's a big mountain to climb. If you are an expert you can jump at anything and choose which is which, but if you are a learner...the tutor and the learner first has to know each other. According to your attitude if you are the tutor, then I will learn a lot of you...we come to know each other, and your behaviour, your politeness...and from that on I start to pick something off of you."

I asked Arthur how long he thought it would take,

> "How long I be coming? As long as my two feet can carry me. If the bus go on strike I can walk it. I don't want to part from them - 'til death us part!"

Mark had already been coming to a class for five years. I asked him how long he might want to keep coming,

"...'til I can open a letter and read it off straight, read a newspaper..just to sort of read something..when you see posters, something in the paper, just to be able to say something about it before other people read it."

Mark said he wasn't thinking about how long it would take because he knew that until recently he'd been wasting time. He had originally been referred to the class by an employer but it was only during the last year that he decided to make a serious effort for himself. He knows that, even with real application, his progress will be slow, but says it doesn't matter "Just so long as I get there."

Nathan had only started coming to class this term,

"I don't want to just read. I want to understand what I read, and to write and understand what I write until you're capable of knowing for yourself and being independent in what you read. So - how long it going to take me? ..I don't know how long it takes..maybe 10 years but I come unless there's no more class here. Well if there's no more class I have to look somewhere else....I want to get free from asking people,"Do this for me. Read that for me. Write that for me"."

Buchi's attendance is erratic because of long working hours and ill-health, but this does not shake her determination,

"I'm keeping to coming because I know just a little, not much so..when I feel alright I come. I'm not going to stop 'til I can read a letter...."

"One Evening a Week is Not Enough"

I am sure that Nathan's estimation of 10 years is quite realistic. That is the length of time for which George had been coming to HRC before he left a year ago. George was not a typical student since, in the course, of ten years of regular attendance at a literacy class he had two books published, the first dictated to his tutor and the second written and edited by himself. But these projects meant that George was given an enormous amount of individual attention by his tutors, including myself, over several years. He stopped attending HRC over a year ago and I went to see him at his home to find out how he saw his progress. I asked George if he was still writing,

"Yes, I write letters...to my sister and my son and daughter and when I finish wrote it I ask someone to read it and correct it properly...It take me a little time though, sometime it take me weeks for I just don't know what to say. I want a word and I don't know how to spell it and it go around in your head trying to spell that word a different way"

There was an old 'Black's Writing Dictionary' on his desk which looked well-used. I asked George if he was writing more than he reads.

"Yes I do. To be honest I can't really sit down and read a book..my mind just stray away..and if I'm on my own, especially if the room's a bit warm, I fall asleep. I can't concentrate at all.."

I asked if he read the letters that people wrote back to him,

"That's where it's so hard - I know I learn it at school for they teach me all that at school but other people's handwriting is very very hard...when I get a letter from back home I can't make out a word..different kinds of writing.."

George said he would like to read and write his own letters because everybody knows his business. When he writes a letter he gets his wife or daughter or friend at work to correct it and he has to ask them to read the reply,

"It's so hard to get it to stick in your mind. I would like to read a book like the chaps at work. I would like to read the newspaper to see what's going on. But I pick up something and I look at it and I just can't make out the word. I get impatient."

I agreed that it must be frustrating to feel like that after all those years at Centerprise, (HRC). This prompted a more positive statement about what he had learnt,

"Mind you, I'm really grateful for what I learn. Before I go to Centerprise, when I just came to this country and I went to a class at Holloway Road and all my mind was back home so I didn't learn a thing. And then I came to Clapton and not even my name I could write. Not even my name! And then I went to Centerprise and today I can write a letter with just a little help. So Centerprise open my eye..but there's plenty more in front of me to take..but I just get to feel it can't stick in my mind. And then again - one evening a week is not enough and after you leave the school you come home with your book and you fling it on the table and forget all about it."

When I described this whole conversation later to colleagues who had known George there was a shocked reaction, a sense of failure. We wanted to hear that he was fully literate, that we had all done a good job and that George had left because he was satisfied with his achievement. He left for a combination of reasons - discouraged by the learning plateau he had reached, a long summer break from the class, a change of tutor...

When George asked me why I thought he found it so slow I talked about the childhood he had written about. I played George a taped extract from a group discussion in which I had been asking about progress. Morris, a Jamaican like George, had contributed,

"Well, I just start this month. I learn a lot. I read all a book about a black man right, that was suffering.

> And I didn't know that book was written. It help me to know what's going on and it help me a lot...I'm interested in it and I want to write one myself.."

This was George's book he was talking about and it seemed he could identify with George's 'suffering'.

As teachers it is not our business to delve into the early childhood experiences of our students, to analyse the possible emotional damage which may block learning and hamper the adult's progress towards literacy. But George, like the majority of these students, is 'normal'. He does not suffer from any physical or neurological disorder. He has a job, a house, a family who he supports. He can engage in intelligent conversation, drive a car. We expect him to learn and we feel we have failed when his achievements do not match our expectations.

And yet Adult Basic Education teaching has evolved a style which accommodates people who learn slowly *for whatever reason.*

What are Learning Difficulties?

New labels may be promoted in an attempt to create new associations, but very often the old prejudice is simply transferred. In a discussion with two FE course tutors, I asked about Gloria, the student I had visited at home who had a history of psychiatric illness. Her account of the courses she had followed at the college differed from the tutors' account. The tutor said,

> "..you see sometimes they get very confused. We had an inspector in..and you get students saying, "Yes, I'm doing seven GCSEs" and you think, "Oh my God". I say to them, "Well, you're not, are you, you're doing City & Guilds", but it's, "Oh yes, but it's GCSE.."

I asked if she had other students on her courses with special needs. The term 'special needs' triggered a curious response,

> "I don't think I would take someone on that's going to disrupt. We had one of these very aggressive people and it wasn't good for the other students - he attacked everybody with a large piece of wood and I don't want that sort of thing.."
> The other tutor chipped in,
> "There are Special Needs courses aren't there? But I think they're for younger ones..."

They then went on to talk about a student who had written to the Home Office to say the tutors were working for the KGB...

This conversation serves as a caution. If I should suggest that there is no clear demarcation between the majority of students in adult literacy classes and those who are said to have 'Special Needs' or Learning Difficulties, I can see that this suggestion will be met with the most extraordinary associations. The hundreds of 'normal' students attending literacy classes in Hackney do not go around wielding lumps of wood or acting out paranoid delusions. Nor do they suffer from the kinds of Learning Difficulties associated with brain damage or an inability to perform 'normally' in the world.

There is another danger in blurring the distinctions. The shortage of full-time places in Adult Training Centres or Social Education Centres in the community has meant that students with Learning Difficulties are often placed in Literacy classes because there is nowhere else for them to go. Most Adult Literacy groups draw on the rich life-experiences of adult students and exchange and discussion is a very important part of learning in such a group. Inclusion of students with Learning Difficulties in ABE classes is not always appropriate, even where literacy skills are compatible. The educational value of sharing common interests and experiences or of working in a group with a common agenda is acknowledged in the existence of literacy classes for women or for Afro-Caribbean students. Similarly, special provision needs to be made (and *is* made at both HRC and in the AEI) for groups of students with Learning Difficulties whose common agenda may focus on aspects of 'normalisation', self-advocacy or skills for independent living.

Having presented a case for separate provision, there is also a long history in ABE classes of successful integration of students with Learning Difficulties in Adult Basic Education classes. In the course of our survey, there were many examples of tutors using labels which, being based on limited expectations, also carry a particularly tolerant attitude towards slow learning,

> "K's been coming for ever. Only comes to Monday evening, never attended any other class. Never misses. Needs social contact of group as well as pattern of attendance. Speech impediment. **Learning difficulties.**"

> "**Special needs** student. Hardly ever misses - been there as long as me."

> "Referred from M___ Day Centre. **Mentally handicapped.** Plods slowly but with satisfaction. Has integrated very well into the class."

The comments below are about students to whom there is no label attached and yet the criteria for achievement appear very similar to those which might be applied to students with Learning Difficulties,

> "Since attending the class she has begun to live independently in her own flat."

"Y. came first in '86 and is still attending. She has had a fair share of emotional difficulties in the past, and used to find it hard to work in a group, but has settled far more in this last year and is more at ease.."

Labels which make distinctions between the curriculum needs of particular groups of students can be useful for those who are trying to address these needs. But tutors may disagree about the effects which labels can have. An experienced AEI tutor reported that, while we could check actual numbers from the initial interview forms, there were,

"A high percentage of young, black British students I have interviewed and placed in classes who have come from special schools, ESN schools, maladjusted units etc. for no apparent reason... When I was meeting them they were hesitant, nice, fairly well adjusted people who wanted to learn and had been prevented from doing so."

Much of the writing by adult literacy students, some in published collections or complete autobiographies, tells of negative school experience or a childhood dominated by hardship and abuse. In one of the group discussions, Rita said that she was always a slow learner and at school in Nigeria the teachers used to beat her and shout at her. In another class I met a student who was too shy to join in the group discussion. The tutor mentioned above, told me about her,

"We have a student who you met called Tracey who has learning difficulties, was classified as mentally handicapped throughout her childhood and was institutionalised. She started off about 8 years ago at an evening class for the mentally handicapped student doing basic literacy and has gone through an extraordinarily interesting history. For example, when I first taught her, she expressed quite overt racist views and found it extremely difficult to operate in a group. She had been hospitalised, institutionalised in whatever it was she was living in. She's now married, living independently - all the social workers and people involved with her said she would never be able to live independently -... and has formed a tremendous relationship with Althea (current tutor who is black), who she adores and goes to (the class) 4 days a week and is the most prolific book producer that Hackney AEI has ever seen. She comes out with at least two books a term about her life. And her life has been horrific. She has been beaten and abused and sexually abused and separated from her family and transferred from one institution to another and she's writing it all out. She's unrecognisable from the woman I taught 8 years ago."

The therapeutic value of re-examining early childhood experience is widely recognised, not only in psychoanalysis and related fields. Whether or not it is fully acknowledged by adult literacy tutors, it appears that many students begin to learn and gain confidence through the opportunity to 'write it all down'.

It is not possible to discover the extent to which emotional damage is responsible for slow learning among adult students. Social and cultural factors - the influence of British colonial rule on Third World schools, or of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Ireland, or of socio-economic factors on child-rearing practice - would all have to be taken into account. At an individual level, we only know what students choose to tell us,

"When I first came somebody bring me because I was in the house. I retire already. She tell me come. I can't read and I can't write so as I came here I feel much better. Now I can do everything - A B C D E - I can do everything like that..I didn't even finish school at home..they chucked me out. When I came to this country I was working and I didn't have time to come to school. I don't know how many years I have been coming now..four years..I am very happy."

Whether the space and time are needed to heal deep wounds or to allow for the loss of short-term memory in old age, to establish a trusting relationship with a tutor or to 'mess about' until they are ready to 'get down to it', the fact is that space and time, patience and tolerance are needed. When asked about the importance of the relationship with her tutor, one student, Belinda, said,

"They are very helpful...and loving."

I have illustrated above the confusion and prejudice which can result from labelling groups of people, but a label such as Learning Difficulties can draw attention to a particular kind of need (the needs of people with mental handicap) and provide a shorthand expression for the people and agencies established to meet these needs. Further Education Colleges as well as Adult Education providers acknowledge some degree of responsibility for setting up appropriate educational provision for students with Learning Difficulties.

This report is about adult literacy students who need the same *quality* of educational provision regardless of the precise cause of their previous inability (or limited ability) to read or write. While special provision is desirable for students with Learning Difficulties (even when integration into mainstream classes is appropriate) there is also a need for a much greater understanding of the educational needs of adults who are not intellectually impaired but whose learning is impeded by all kinds of past and present disadvantages. There is no label which can sum up these barriers to learning and point to a realistic assessment of the long-term needs of 'normal' adult literacy students.

When I asked tutors about the progress of their students, they were often unable to specify particular skills. Some seemed embarrassed and apologetic about students who were still coming after five years but were not ready to move on. Of one student, who had been attending for over three years, two tutors shared a 'gut feeling' that this student was, 'about to launch into learning'.

A readiness to 'move on' begs the question of the nature of the destination. Does the notion of 'progression' imply that ABE tutors should be training adult students to accept the more difficult conditions for learning which are a feature of much Further and Higher Education? Many of these conditions - larger class sizes, a set curriculum, cultural assumptions, tests and assessments - may well be the very evils which are at the root of the ABE student's initial failure. Any attempt to challenge these institutional barriers to learning must be accompanied by an honest and realistic appraisal of the amount of time and the degree of personal support which is needed by the students who have had the courage and the patience to risk a repetition of failure and start again.

What Should We Expect?

While arguing for recognition of the slow pace and patience required in adult literacy learning, it is important to distinguish between patience and complacency. The tutors whose classes I visited seemed only too aware of this and the questions I was asking about progress and goals, often prompted a guilty response,

> "Oh God, we *ought* to have been doing more evaluation.. we *ought* to have been pushing students on to college courses.."

Research in schools has shown that pupils' performance is closely related to their teachers' expectations. In the 'Oakwood School Experiment'(1) teachers were told that verbal reasoning tests administered throughout the school were actually tests which would predict 'sudden, dramatic intellectual growth' in pupils across a range of current ability levels. The experimenters selected 20% of the children at random and told their teachers that these were the children who were expected to make this sudden spurt in the coming year. The result was that significantly greater progress was made by pupils who had been singled out in this way.

This kind of experiment should make us wary of underestimating a student's potential. On the other hand, if a teacher's expectations are too high for a particular student, then both teacher and student may face frustration, disappointment and failure.

(1) ' *Pygmalion in the Classroom', by Jack Rosenthal & Lenore Jacobson,[Holt,Rinehart & Winston Inc.],1968*

Occasionally a student will express frustration with slow progress whether, like George, they had left after ten years or like this student, who had been attending for almost a year,

> "Do you know any other method that make us learn much better than this way?" he asked me.

I asked him if there were things he could do now that he couldn't do before.

> "Well, I think my writing has improved..and there are lots of things I couldn't do but I still don't think I could read properly..but I haven't been coming that long, and I should be doing better than I am but because of my time.."

He then went on to describe all the demands on his time which prevent him from getting on with this learning.

Most of the students I met were more patient, more accepting of the slow pace of their learning and many appreciated the fact that nobody was pushing them. But, among those in the target group who had *left* their class, the most common reason given was 'work' or 'pressure'. Internal and historical factors obviously affect learning ability but it must also be true that the competing demands for the time, energy and concentration of adult students is the greatest hindrance to steady progress in literacy learning for adults.

The following chapter, 'Outcomes', chronicles some of these pressures, but first I record the discussion of learning experiences of students who are still attending classes in order to evaluate which are the most significant aspects of practice and progress in the classroom.

Learning

Barbara had been sent to a primary school in London unable to speak any English at all. She described an unco-ordinated attempt to provide special language help at a centre away from the school but she felt, "I had to do most of the learning at home to try and catch up...the teachers just hadn't got time." She was now coming to an evening class twice a week,

> "What I'm saying is, it's not coming and learning it quick, it's a matter of coming and taking it in - like there's no exams ...we're not kids, we've come here as adults and we're here to learn what we feel we need to at our own pace. If there were exams that would be different, but there's no exams so I don't see why they should rush you. If I feel that I want to take two years to learn something, then I'll take two years..I'm 26 and I look at it this way. If it's taken me 'til I'm 26 then it can take another 26 years...as long as there's teachers I'll keep coming."

Alan, another student, pointed out,

> "But you may not have these teachers all the time.."

Barbara said that although you get attached to the teachers you know, she would expect that the people who teach, "these kinds of classes, for people who can't read and can't spell", would know how to relate to her needs.

> "I don't want someone shouting at me saying 'Get this done', and rushing me..I wouldn't come no more 'cos you're not learning..."

The general signs of agreement from the rest of this group indicated that they were happy to let Barbara speak for them.

> "These kind of things, the way I look at it, it's not like a topic, say history, where you've got to learn some things and then you have an exam at the end of it...this is a lifetime thing...well, grammar's not the kind of thing where you come to the end of a year and have an exam...it's something that will come with me to the day I die. Well, maybe I'll never *know* 'til the day I die. So if I'm going to come up here and have some teacher rushing me I won't come no more..."

"Here I know the People"

Many students stressed the importance of their relationship with both the tutor and other students in their learning.

These students were talking about how it felt when they first started the class,

Sheila: "There was others like myself coming there for the same reason so it was alright."

Paul: "When I first came I was a completely shy person. I was wearing dark shades and it helped to build my confidence up 'til I took my shades off. But it took me a long while to get used to it..."

Nathan travelled a long way to a class at HRC. He had started coming there before discovering that there were classes available very near his home. I asked him why he didn't change classes and save a long journey,

> "Oh no, I got used to here now. If I go new one again I'll be starting again - here I know the people."

While describing the importance of the personal relationships with tutors, students were aware of the problem of dependency,

> "...you tend to get used to one teacher and it really starts getting good so you depend on that teacher and when she goes you get kind of lazy again. Well, they kind of build up your courage and when they're gone you think, 'Oh my God, how am I going to do without that teacher?' You know N. (a relatively new tutor to this group)...she'll give you a right good pushing and I feel I've got a lot of confidence because she doesn't mess about - as you know, she's very serious with her work - like if she went I don't know if I could do it again - it's the same with M. (N's predecessor) or anyone else that's left."

Working Together

A major difference between ABE classes and most college courses is the tutor:student ratio - an average ABE class consisting of one tutor for 6-8 students while FE tends to have much higher student numbers to each tutor.

This allows for some of the 1:1 attention which is essential in the early stages. Belinda, an elderly woman, gave a very moving account of her first lesson. It is not possible to convey in writing the tremendous pride which Belinda was expressing about an achievement which may seem small but was clearly a great step at this stage in her life,

> "The first time I came I was with M. and she was very nice to me because I tell her where I'm from, Jamaica, and she write out all those bits and pieces and I start reading from it. You know..she ask me questions..and she write it down, say, 'My name is Belinda. I was born in Jamaica. I came to London three months ago. Now I'm living at..(Belinda recited her address, running her finger along an imaginary page).' And now I can read all that and spell it. I can spell London and I could spell Jamaica even."

I asked some of the students how they felt about 1:1 and group teaching. Belinda was in a class where the general consensus was that they would prefer more individual attention:

> Elizabeth:" I like to have one teacher but I like working in a group as well."

Belinda had said earlier that she liked to work alone with the tutor but then she, too acknowledged the value of group work,

> "From one to another you get more understanding."

In another class the consensus was more favourable to group work.

> "It's different because when you're in a group you can talk about the work together. In school the teacher just explains to you and you have to get on with it.."

> "You learn together. It's friendly. It makes learning more interesting and we are progressing.."

Group work is obviously important for students who want to develop skills and confidence in verbal communication as well as written. Annabel said she has made good progress and likes working in a group,

> "I'm better in reading, better in writing, better in explaining things.."

"You need a lot of confidence before you do things"

It is not surprising that tutors so often find it difficult to describe their students' progress since the most significant progress can be so intangible.

Mark told me that he decided to do something about his reading and writing when he was confronted with a form which he couldn't fill in. Our conversation continued,

Me: Could you fill that form in now?
Mark: I don't know, I haven't tried it. I could read what it said but I just didn't want to bodge up the form - you know, I can read 'Occupation', but it's writing 'part fitter'.
Me: And can you spell 'part fitter' now?
Mark: (laughing) Yes and no. I don't mind if I fill it in wrong - so long as I start to fill it in it won't bother me. Before, I would use any excuse to get out of it

Mark was certainly not the only student who described this new ability to take a risk, a willingness to 'have a go' as the most important achievement. Buchi said,

"..before I would only write words I know and I wouldn't try nothing new whereas like now, I'll know the beginning is C or O and I'll try it and then look in the dictionary. One time I wouldn't bother with that."

In another group I asked Justin if he felt nervous about reading aloud. He said not since he came here. So I asked whether that was because he felt more comfortable with the people or because he was better at it.

"Yes, well, I'm not so embarrassed about doing it.."

The lack of confidence which so many adult students need to overcome is often rooted in childhood experiences of failure.

"..when I was in school they throw me out because I was not sharp..my teacher put me in the corner..you know, 'I don't have time for you', they don't care...if you can't do the work they sling you out."

For some, unfortunately, this kind of experience can be repeated in adulthood,

"I first went to Hackney College and asked for reading and writing and they gave me a form to fill out. I filled it out and went to the class and then they said I can't cope with the work they're giving me so they told me to come to another class. I felt so embarrassed, I just couldn't cope with the work ..."

It has taken two years in an AEI class for Annabel to feel she is ready to start learning,

".... I have learnt a lot of things since I've been here..and I've got a little bit more confidence in myself and I can talk to people - before I used to be stuttering you know, I was very shy and just didn't know how to talk properly...you need a lot of confidence before you do things really.."

Conclusions

The observations in this chapter do not lead to tidy conclusions.

1. Adult literacy students need time: Time to overcome previous negative experience, time to develop a trusting relationship with tutor and other students, time to formulate goals and time to work towards these, time to assess and reassess these goals and time to decide when they are ready to move on. Above all, these students need time away from the wearying distractions and responsibilities of adult life and, for many students "one evening a week is not enough".

2. The writing and publishing of adult literacy students' autobiographies are valuable and important activities for the authors as well as providing relevant and useful learning material for other students.

3. While we need commonly understood language, or labels to describe human experience, when labels are assigned to groups of people on the basis of judgements about their ability to learn we must always be ready to challenge these judgements.

4. Where teachers' expectations for a student are limited, there is more room for patience and tolerance of slow learning. But low expectations can also limit student achievement. There is a need for increased awareness in Further & Higher Education and among vocational training agencies of the needs and learning patterns of ABE students. This can only be achieved if ABE practitioners are able to make positive statements about these needs rather than allow them to be obscured through the tutors' feelings of failure or shame.

5. There is evidence throughout both the AEI and the Reading Centre of successful integration of students with Learning Difficulties in general adult literacy classes. There is also separate provision in both settings and there is a valid case for both kinds of provision to continue and to be extended.

6. Adult literacy tutors need to be supported in helping students to set appropriate intermediate goals which can be recognised and achieved without restricting the possibility of unlimited progression towards independence and wider educational choices. Progress is

not always easy to define and tutors need to be able to identify and value small achievements, to appreciate their role in the long wait before a sudden leap in learning and to accept the set-backs when the various pressures in students' lives lead to erratic attendance, exhaustion or an inability to concentrate.

7. Outcomes

This chapter is based on the replies from tutors to the initial questionnaire in which we asked what had happened to students who had been in their class in October 1986.* There will be some discrepancies between accounts from students and tutors or between those from two tutors who have a different experience of the same student. However, the reasons given for students leaving a class offer us a great deal of insight into patterns of attendance and progress in literacy learning as well as describing outcomes for students who leave.

Fig. v
LENGTH OF ATTENDANCE

One third of the students from the Target Group were still attending classes two years later in July 1988.

From the 375 returns which comprise the target group, 248 included an estimate of the length of time for which students had been attending class. These figures were not classified beyond 3 years although a significant number of students had been attending for over 5 years. There appears to be a tendency for students to continue for longer in HRC classes (37 % attending for over 3 years) than in AEI classes (18% attending for over 3 years).

	HRC	*AEI*	*Total*
LESS THAN 1 TERM	6	37	43
1 TERM - 1 YEAR	5	48	53
1 YEAR - 2 YEARS	7	39	46
2 YEARS - 3 YEARS	15	35	50
OVER 3 YEARS	20	36	56
TOTALS	53	195	248

* *See Chapter 4 for an explanation of the statistical survey.*

Why did they leave?

Of the 375 students in our target group 252 were reported to have left or moved on. The other 123 are still attending their original class. The figures below are taken from the comments made by tutors as to why they think a student left or what the student told them. Among the "not known" category there must be numbers of students whose reason for leaving would fall into the other categories below. Hopefully many of these would be people whose needs were met by the class. What is quite clear, though, is that the external factors in people's lives - work and other commitments are given as the reason for leaving far more often than any indication that educational goals have been reached.

Reason for leaving	*Number of students recorded*
Not Known	
Non-starters	38
Reason not clear	24
Work (including YTS)	42
Pressure or External Factors	
Complex factors	14
Health	11
Dependents	17
Housing	10
Travel	3
Other	2
	57
Changes (of tutor or class)	12
No Motivation	11
Needs More	26
Needs Met	13
College	29
Total	252

'Non-Starters' (38)

38 students were recorded as 'Non-starters'. These include:

12 students who may have attended before the current tutor took over the class and didn't continue when previous tutor left.

3 students who enrolled but never attended (which may also account for some of the 12 above). Students have often described how it can take several years and a great summoning of courage before they enrol in a literacy class. It is probable that many such struggles lie behind comments from tutors like,

"Never really started - every now and then rings up to arrange interview then doesn't turn up."

23 students who attended for just a few weeks. Some stayed long enough to make an impression on the tutor,

"Nice bloke, couldn't get it together to come more than about three times."

"Seemed bright but restless. Left after a few weeks. Aims unclear."

A thorough, long-term study would be able to establish how many of these students try again, perhaps several times over many years, in different classes.

Reason Not Clear (24)

Tutors often report that they followed up 'non-starters'. They also tend to follow up students who fail to re-enrol after a summer break,

"Not attended this year at all - we sent several letters but not reply."

My impression was that, since it usually involves yet more unpaid work, the time tutors spend in this kind of follow-up relates directly to the tutor's assessment of the student's needs or commitment to learning. The comment above indicates far more concern than,

"Always an occasional attender - now dropped out"

"Left during the year - not sure why."

Even where tutor's comments are more informative, it is often difficult to categorize them,

"Lived very far away - had kids - too advanced anyway".

This refers to a student who had only attended for two months and begs as many questions as the remark, "no longer attending".

The four visits I made to ex-students in their homes did not clarify the real 'reasons for leaving'.*

My interview with Martin demonstrates the complexity of the many factors involved in this process.

Martin was a student in a 'New Opportunities' class in the AEI. His tutors had invested a great deal of time in trying to meet his very specific need for help with background reading before applying for a professional training course. In trying to explain why he left, they concluded that his attitude was arrogant and unco-operative. I went to see him to find out what had really happened and whether he had continued with his education.

Martin had enrolled originally for help with spelling and study skills. He had been working part-time and was offered more work. That was his reason for leaving the class. He also complained that other students in his group did not share his interests or were not able to read well enough. Martin started a full-time course, 'Family & Community Care' at Hackney College (Chelmer Road) but found that the course covered very little of the particular work which he was interested in.

My impression was that, although he had difficulties with spelling, Martin did not like to see himself as a "literacy student". In our statistics he may appear as having left because of work or to go to college. However, he was following a career and attending in-service training courses which did not require much written work. It may be that his attendance at the AEI class was an important step for Martin in coming to terms with the choice which was open to him; either he would have to apply himself to the tedious task of learning to spell before 'moving on', or he could find ways around the problem, avoiding situations where the spelling would really matter. He had chosen the latter and, if his tutors helped him make that choice, albeit indirectly, then it would be fair to claim that his needs were met by the class. It might also be the case that a short period in a class with students whose skills were more limited than Martin's was enough to boost his confidence and help him to feel better about his own abilities.

Failure or success? 'Drop out' or 'progression'? Martin's experience will not fit a single category.

The categories which follow give no more than an overall indication of the reasons why students leave a class.

Work (42)

Although the most frequently recorded reason for leaving, in the classroom meetings with students, work was rarely mentioned in the discussion of future goals. The students talked about independence, further study or a particular skill, and the need to earn a living is often seen by students and tutors as a barrier or disruption to learning.

"I would like to go to college full-time but I don't think they would give me the time off work."

Paul, whose memory had been affected by a serious head injury a few years ago, has been attending several daytime classes in a range of subjects apart from ABE. He said,

"Originally, when I used to come I thought I had all the time in the world - but now the government's changing all the rules - for supplementary benefits and all that. They're forcing people to go out to work just for the sake of it. And I can't afford to live on the money they give me 'cos I have to pay double the amount for my rent allowances and all that. So I'm now starting to think about what I can do.."

Morris had been referred to a class by the Job Centre but, although he has a skill, he does not feel ready to link his literacy learning with any vocational element,

> "..I do mechanic work and I would like to further the business of mechanic so I still have to sort it out. Because there is always books to look into and if my brain is not functionable I can't do it. Because you might give me your car and I don't know the timing for it and I go and put a false timing on it..and so I have to learn a bit more reading and writing and spelling and all that and get them all together."

I asked Morris if he thought he could do with a special course of reading for mechanics,

> "No. Well I need to read first more and then I can say well that's it finished now and then I can take up that book about mechanic and start because all the words that I learn already, some of them will be in that book. But I jump that obstacle now and go on the street after."

While most of the tutor reports included in this section were brief remarks like, "Got a job", or "Left because of work", some report this as a negative step,

> "Speaks 20 languages including Japanese but not literate in any. Made progress but long battle over son's immigration and had to get a job for nationality procedure so stopped coming."

Many tutors and some of the students complain about work adversely affecting progress. Tiredness is a major problem,

> "No/slow progress. Still attending classes twice a week but works from 4 am and sleeps through class."

Work is the most common explanation for erratic attendance,

> "I work full-time and sometimes I come home in the evenings and I feel ill so then I don't come."

Some students still seem to progress in these circumstances,

> "Does night shifts so can't come very week - has improved a lot, especially confidence."

For others, erratic attendance is simply accepted as a fact of life,

> "Came regularly for two terms, vanished for several months, reappeared Sept. '87, comes and goes v.irregularly now. Probably working all hours - has two jobs."

I was struck by the long periods which can elapse between attendances,

> "M. came regularly for 18 months, disappeared altogether Dec. '86 - suddenly reappeared June '88. Said he was working."

Many tutors record the frustration caused by erratic attendance,

> "R. needs writing skills very badly for report writing at work in Home for elderly - supervisory position there, very overworked and sometimes misses for that reason.."

Often it is changes within a job which lead first to erratic attendance and then to withdrawal from a class.

> Attended fairly regularly for about a year - then work commitments changed - shift work - more responsibility - and couldn't continue - came now and then and stopped."

This comment from a tutor may present a negative view of a success story - after a year in the class this student was given more responsibility at work.

Although many tutors may feel that the student would have benefited more by continuing in the class, finding a job can also, of course, represent a goal achieved,

> "J. has become a friend. She dropped out because she is now working but also because she has found new confidence and is addressing all kinds of other problems in her life."

> "M. attended regularly for almost a year and left to run a Kebab House."

However, my impression from the classroom discussions was that work, in the kinds of jobs currently available to these students was much more likely to be an unavoidable necessity than a positive outcome. Education was a route to a far more ambitious goal - the kind of work in which one would feel personally fulfilled and for which one would gain status and respect in the community.

> "You got to know a lot of things to be successful"

The general image of success at work was viewed in association with increased general education rather than with any specific skills training,

> "Well in Brazil now you got to know a lot of things to be successful. I would like to know Brazilian history for a start."

Often, when a tutor asks a new student about his/her goals, the student will answer, "I just want to be an educated person like you". Adult literacy workers recognise this desire for general education and writing weekends, outings, book-readings and a host of other extra-mural activities, are organised by staff and volunteers, most often in their own (unpaid) time.

Morris was quoted earlier saying that, al-

though he intended to continue working as a mechanic, he wanted to achieve the functional skills required to read a motor manual via a much wider approach to literacy. He had greatly enjoyed a 'Writing Weekend' in Cambridge,

> "..I never been to Cambridge before in my life. it was nice, and I would like more trips like that, every week, give me more experience....We take notes of the things that we did, and been to see some buildings that I never known them was made, and some bridges and some schools, everything, and we written it down."

It might seem a wild extravagance to suggest that regular residential courses should be provided for all literacy students unless we choose to compare it with the cost of maintaining a student for three years in one of those Cambridge colleges of which Morris was so happy to get a brief glimpse.

The debate which surrounds the relationship between Education and Training is one which is at the centre of much political debate. The important point to note here is that the distinction between work as an inevitable fact of life, and the kind of work to which 'educated' people can aspire is perceived just as sharply by those who are seeking Adult Basic Education as by the middle-class parents who persuade their children to stay on at school after GCSE.

Pressure or External Factors (57)

Given as a reason for leaving for 57 students.

The pressures of people's daily lives often make it impossible for them to keep coming to classes. Each student's progress is obviously going to be affected far more by their personal history and their current circumstances than by anything a teacher can do. But these pressures change. This is why it is so important that Adult Education provision should be available for students as and when they are able to use it. We know that students leave and then start again either in the same class or another one but only a very long-term study could establish the true patterns of attendance and determine when a student has really left.

Also, the pressures under which adults are trying to learn cannot always be categorised.

> "F. is Iranian - v. nervous at first (Tehran/politics/feared for her life) so hard to concentrate. Stopped coming because got a job in Shoreditch & married to demanding husband. May enrol evenings next year."

Many just cited 'Personal problems' as a reason for non-attendance, or that a student had popped in to say he was busy and would be coming back when there was less pressure.

Social pressures can also get in the way of learning.

> "...difficult home life - husband opposes her going to classes.."

Students who do not like to tell their friends that they attend classes often talk of taking a devious route to the class in order to avoid being seen, or of the need to invent an 'alibi' for a regular class. I am sure that Mark speaks for many

> "I came for a few months and then I used to get led astray. You see I don't tell people that I come here so they don't know. Every time someone comes round for me, I can never get rid of them. I'd find it embarrassing to say 'No, I'm going to reading classes.' So they say, 'Come round the corner, we're having a laugh', or whatever and, for a few years I didn't really care too much. But then this year I went to fill in a form for this job. I had the job but I had to fill in this form and I couldn't fill in the form and I felt sick as a parrot. That's when I decided I'd really try to put in extra time."

Health (11)

Ill-health accounts more for erratic attendance than for students leaving altogether. Even where students are reported as having left, it is quite likely that many will return,

> "..is quite advanced in years and has arthritis, finds it difficult to come in winter"

> "Dropped out after two years - hay fever kept him away in summers"

Dependents (17)

Ill-health of dependents naturally keeps students away,

> "Very frail old man - complete beginner - learnt to write his name and learnt that he could learn but had to leave to tend sick wife"

Ten students left "to have a baby" but this does not mean they have lost touch,

> "She'll turn up again"

Housing (10)

Homelessness was presented as a problem in one case. For the others it was just reported that they moved away from the area.

Changes (12)

In the group discussion many students talked about how long it took them to pluck up the courage to come to a class. A key factor when they finally make it through the door is the relationship which develops both with the tutor and with the other students in the group. Changes in the group can prove too disruptive for some students,

> "C. ceased attending when the previous tutor left.."

"D. flirted his way through a year at the class and dropped out when I left."

Relationships among students also affect attendance,

"W. was a very basic reader and writer who made a lot of progress in terms of working independently and on constructing sentences. Some of his friends came to class as well which didn't help him -he left when they did."

"Wrote a lot about herself. I think she was scared off by another student.."

Re-locating a class can also lead to drop-outs,

"A. made a lot of progress socially - although she never relaxed enough to remove her coat after three years, I felt that she did become quite confident and articulate and she felt the same. When we moved class ....her husband wouldn't let her travel."

"E. was a long term student with v.basic literacy needs and in need of social contact. The class was very useful to her socially and she made occasional progress which always relapsed. Her husband was v.v.v. unhappy about her writing about herself. She left when we moved class."

No Motivation (11)

Some adults may be able to learn when they would rather be doing something else, but Adult Basic Education tutors are usually wary of referrals which are not motivated by the students themselves.

Even if learning takes place, tutors are affected by the student's attitude,

"J. attended a 'special needs' school and his gran 'encouraged' him to come to us as well. He did make significant progress in being able to be left alone for more than 5 minutes. Given that he clearly came under duress we didn't follow it up when he stopped."

The issue of literacy classes for students with Learning Difficulties, or 'Special Needs' is discussed elsewhere but four of the six reported as having left because they were referred by parents are also those who had attended 'E.S.N.' schools. For others, we do not know why they started,

"Was not committed - did not attend of his own free will"

The most well-meaning actions of employers can sometimes appear misdirected,

"Day-release from ___v.little progress, didn't really want to be here"

But Mark, who now feels he wasted an opportunity, has come back to the class a few years later,

"I was working with a man who made me go - he said, 'I'd like you to get on well', and he found out - I couldn't read so he said he'd send me one day a week to Hackney Reading Centre. And he sent me there and I had to prove that I went there. I kept that up for a couple of months and then I found ways of missing out because he left...I really regret it now."

A student referred through 'Restart' had thought his benefit would be cut off if he didn't attend. He was not well and had a lot of family commitments so, as soon as his tutor reassured him about money, he stopped coming.

Another student, referred from a probation office, left after two weeks. However, we may not be aware of the successful referrals from such agencies and these reports are only of situations where tutors see the original referral as being a factor in the student's subsequent actions.

Needs More (26)

For students who lack confidence, a short spell in a literacy class can provide just the boost they need before trying something more demanding. Whether these short-term attendances are recorded as 'Needs met' or as 'Needs more' is based entirely on how the tutor has recorded the experience:

"Dropped out after a few weeks - needed advanced ESL really"

implies a negative experience unless we can then discover that the student found a more appropriate class. Sometimes the tutors record their attempts at follow up.

"..perhaps a bit advanced for this class wasn't what he was looking for. He didn't reply to any letters we sent."

Sometimes tutors are clear that they were not able to meet that student's needs in the group,

"..skills already pretty good. may have dropped out because I gave him too little attention and the beginners too much. I know I did this".

This is not always a case of skill levels as there are many cases of students wanting a particular teaching style or content which the tutor feels unable to provide,

"Specifically wanted Black only group"

"Would have liked a more formal approach"

"..only wanted to read Bible.."

The greatest resistance to the integration of people with Learning Difficulties into mainstream provision is the fear of 'challenging behaviour',

"S. came for a few weeks. Learning difficulties. Didn't get on well with other students. Disruptive. needed 1:1."

This is certainly a problem which requires our attention but it is important to note that this survey produced more reports of unacceptable behaviour among people who are *not* described as having Learning Difficulties,

> "D. had had a difficult education, refusing to stay at *any* school...began to work independently. Had an argument with a student in class, went home and got an axe - was not persuaded to return!"

> "Came for two years and then stopped. N.(tutor) scared to follow up because he was violent."

Another problem which has been raised in relation to students with Learning Difficulties, is that of students attending inappropriate classes because there was nowhere else for them to go. This also arises with students whose difficulties are associated with emotional needs,

> "K's literacy skills were O.K. but v. severe psychological problems - comprehension/communications haywire..she said it was all too easy.."

Since these are reports on the students who have left, it must be borne in mind that these are instances where tutors felt unable to meet particular needs. Many success stories are not reported because they would be hidden among the numerous comments like, "Still attending", "Moved out of the area", etc.

But literacy tutors can and do take on an enormous range of demands which cannot be separated from the learning process but which would be insuperable if the student:tutor ratio was higher or if demands of a curriculum were to take precedence.

Needs Met (13)

It is clear that many students can spend a short period in an ABE class and achieve the goals they have set for themselves at that time. Even for those who can read and write, a literacy class may be appropriate, as for N.,

> "Not a literacy student - from Sri Lanka - came to brush up and check herself out"

A change in the priority which a student gives to the class may also be an indication that the class fulfilled a need which is no longer pressing,

> "C. had a very specific spelling need and an active social life. The latter won out."

> "R. stopped literacy last year - needs met and busy with church involvement - still attends numeracy erratically."

Most of those whose needs have been met in an ABE class will appear in the statistics as having left because of work, college, children etc. But I suspect there are many among the 'Reasons unknown' who appear to be 'satisfied customers' or who

> "attended as long as he needed to"

> "stayed as long as necessary to gain confidence in her job"

Hopefully, many of the students who have left, for whatever reason, will feel like Barbara, that they have made useful gains,

> "...you know that if you read something and it doesn't make sense, you double check more than what you would have done before...so even if I left here, like if I didn't have the time to do it, at home if I'm writing something I can think back to the skills I got in the class, so that's something I've really learnt."

Conclusions

1. It is likely that many students take several years to turn resolve into action and there may be a number of 'false starts' before a student is able to enrol and attend regularly.

2. Employment can prove to be a hindrance to learning as much as a successful outcome. Very few of the students left as a result of achieving direct vocational goals.

3. While an unreliable job market and a range of other pressures lead to students leaving, most tutors seemed to be confident that the student would resume classes at a future date.

4. Caring for dependent relatives accounts for the inability of many students to continue with their own learning. Creche provision would obviously enable many more students to continue to attend classes. There may also be a case for extending the home tuition service which the AEI provides.

5. While time may be wasted in enrolling unmotivated students, if the first experience in the class is positive, such students may return to learning when changed circumstances provide a new motivation.

6. Changes in location, tutor or composition of a class result in student losses, especially where there are already external pressures to prevent a student attending.

7. 'Challenging behaviour' is not confined to students with Learning Difficulties.

8. Sympathetic tutors and small groups are often able to provide students with long-term support in other aspects of their lives, and

some students will return for occasional help with specific tasks. For example, where inadequate literacy skills may prevent people from exercising their rights to housing, education, employment or welfare services these issues will naturally be brought to the class.

9. Using the figures as a rough guide, and excluding the 'Not known' and 'Non-starters' category from the total, the reports of literacy students moving on to college courses comprised only 15% of those who had left since October 1986 ,(i.e. 29 out of the 190 for whom reasons were given).

8.
Progress & Progression

In this chapter I make a distinction between 'Progress' and 'Progression'. A discussion of student 'progress' involves looking at methods and criteria for evaluating the ongoing learning of students in adult basic education classes. The term 'Progression' carries an association of movement from one class to another, the ending of one stage and the beginning of another, in which goals are re-defined and a new curriculum is followed.

Tutors are only able to guide student progression with reference to their progress. This is achieved through constant monitoring and evaluation. In the early stages of literacy learning, such evaluation that takes place will usually be conducted against criteria defined by the student. We have already seen that these criteria are based on fundamental human needs such as the need for independence, privacy, self-respect and freedom of choice.

The direction taken at subsequent stages will depend entirely on both the long-term and intermediate goals perceived by the student. Such goals may be clearly defined and articulated, or they may rest on vague aspirations of which the student may not be fully aware and which the tutor may not understand.

I devised a questionnaire for tutors* in order to get some idea of current practice in the evaluation of progress and the provision of educational guidance. The first part of this chapter includes an analysis of the responses to this questionnaire and a discussion of the factors affecting choices about progression for ABE students. This discussion is based on my conversations with the student groups, ABE tutors and FE course tutors as well as on data from the statistical survey.

* *See Chapter 4 Fig iv*

The second part of the chapter comprises a review of some of the work which was being developed in order to establish or facilitate progression routes across institutional barriers in Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets.

PART ONE

(i) Evaluating Progress

Tutors at Hackney Reading Centre all share a room and there is an established system for writing a brief Group Record at the end of every session in a book which is openly available. Once a term the staff have student progress meetings where they can share concerns about the progress of particular students. There has also been an annual Evaluation Sheet (itself the subject of continual re-evaluation), which encourages tutors and students to spend considerable time reviewing the years work. This is usually followed up by an evaluation day which takes the form of an end-of-year celebration with a review of group events as well as individual progress.

In the AEI there is far more variation in practice. I listed possible methods for evaluation/assessment of students' progress and asked tutors to tick the ones they used.

Informal discussion with students

All tutors report some kind of discussion of progress with their students:

As a group	1
Individually	6
Both group & individually	8
	15

Discussion with colleagues

Nine of the fifteen also discuss progress with their colleagues.

Written records

Twelve of the fifteen keep some kind of written record of progress at varying intervals:

During each class	1
After each class	3

(One comment: "An aim rather than a reality")

During and after each class	1

(One comment: .."notes on spelling, reading, problems etc")

More often than termly	1
Once a term	2
After each class and more often than termly	2
After each class and once a year	2
No written records	3
	15

These replies illustrate that although many tutors are very conscientious about evaluation and are open to tackling the issue of progression, there is little evidence of any practical support for this

work. There is a wide variety of practice in the AEI for evaluating student progress.

Educational Advice

The questions and answers on this topic are listed below:

(1) Do you give educational guidance to your students?

Yes	13
Occasionally	1
"When asked and when able to"	1

(2) Who would you ask for information about other courses?

Head of Department	2
Head of Department & Colleagues	4
Course tutors	2
Colleagues and course tutors	1
Education Advice Service & colleagues	2
Colleagues/HEAS/Hackney College	1
Full-time staff, look in prospectus, phone local college	1
Ask a friend who has done the course	1
No reply	1
	15

(3) Are there any particular courses you have recommended for your students?

Adult Foundation Course at City & East London College	3
Adult Foundation (Ayrsome Rd) & Return to Study (Keltan)	1
Nursery Helpers/Child Care/ Social Workers	1
HRC Summer Scheme, Assertiveness Training for Women	1
Photography/ESL/Study Skills	1
Using computers, typing, women's self-defence	1
Computer course	1
Hackney College	1
No/None in particular	4
Don't know enough about this	1
	15

(4) Do you know about the Hackney Education Advice Service (HEAS)?

Yes	11
No	4

(5) Do you know where it is?

Yes	9
No	6

(6) Do you know what they provide?

Yes	9
"I think so"	1
No	5

(7) Would you consider inviting an education advice worker to visit your class? I asked for tutors to add any comments to their answer to this question. The one tutor who replied "No" made no further comment. The other 14 replied yes, but some of the comments qualified this:

> "They are always too busy"
>
> "If I felt it was appropriate for those particular students at that time."
>
> "If group as a whole wanted advice"
>
> "Depending on numbers and make-up of class"
>
> "Good idea a) to get educational advice per se and b) to introduce students to HEAS/get them thinking about other courses."
>
> "If students wanted to 'move on'. At present they're not inclined to take up other courses."
>
> "Yes...but probably wouldn't need to."

The final question was an attempt to see what tutors would give priority to in a ludicrously short amount of time:

If you were paid for one session, (say, three hours) per year to work on helping students 'move on' from each class, how would you use the time?

Two did not reply. One tutor said they would need to consult someone first and another said. "Can't imagine in three hours". One tutor did not feel such a session would be appropriate.

> "Most that want to move on are either in the process of doing that or are going towards it. Others do not even want to think about moving on until they have reached a certain level of literacy that they're happy with."

One tutor suggested an outing to HEAS and two others included the idea of inviting somebody from HEAS to the class. One of these based her suggestions on previous experience,

> "I would ask someone from HEAS to come and talk to a class where there were people ready to 'move on'. I would have discussed 'moving on' with students in other classes or suggested the tutors do so, so I could have a collection of questions from as many students as possible to ask her. This is what I do in Islington using EASIA (Education Advice Service for Islington Adults)".

Four other tutors also gave priority to a group discussion,

> "..to discuss ambitions, strategies etc."

These tutors clearly felt that preparation was needed before seeking information,

"..group discussion based on a written form to help students focus on how they'd like to move on. Then I would consider how best to follow this up."

"Group discussion about 'moving on' - expectations, interests and fears of students. Then maybe looking for appropriate courses in prospectuses and giving info. about places like HEAS."

One tutor, although doubling the time allowance, is probably being more realistic about time constraints than those above,

"Three hours would be spent researching courses, then three hours to pass information to students."

Two tutors outlined an approach which deals with student progression on an individual basis,

"..check out individual needs and the practical feasibility of 'moving on' - e.g. childcare, mobility etc. so you don't raise unrealisable hopes."

"I would first describe the course/s in question, help the student decide if it was appropriate, help the student fill in the necessary forms or prepare for interview, possibly visit the venue and meet the tutors, assist with travel training, book lists, advise on writing materials, note-taking etc."

Some of the tutors know nothing at all about HEAS and many that know a little have reservations about using their resources. Tutors are not even paid for the hypothetical three hours which I suggested in the final question and yet, in the process of asking about their work, I often seemed to provoke expressions of guilt and self-criticism that they have not been able to do more to help students 'move on'.

(ii) Fear of Failure

It appears that a more structured approach to regular evaluation would be helpful to both students and tutors engaged in a process which can be so slow as to feel directionless.

On the issue of progression, however, I detected a resistance from some tutors which went beyond the expressions of guilt described above. I suspect this resistance comes from the empathy which many tutors feel for the students who have already experienced failure.

Some students come to classes after failing the entry test for a government training course. Or, while attending courses at FE Colleges, they come for extra help with literacy or numeracy skills. In these cases, there will be a curriculum defined by the particular course, test or exam., and the tutor is forced to direct the work from a starting point of student failure or inadequacy. This may be compensated for by the fact that the goals for these students are already clearly defined. Previous experience of failure is common to most adult literacy students who have been to school but this can be compounded when students have taken their first step into adult education and are misdirected. I met Rose in a class at HRC and she told me of her first attempts to learn to read and write as an adult.

"I went over the school, the college facing Hackney Down....I saw two ladies and I ask them and I say 'I'm shy' and they said, 'Don't shy. Come right in'. They just opened my heart and I went in. They said, 'It's not here', and sent me down to Mare Street (Keltan House)..."Rose was referred to several classes,"I remember one time there was a teacher, a man, and he come in and he put some writing on the wall. I don't know what it was. It was words to tell you what to do. And he just put it on the wall and left...I didn't know what the words say so I just sat there to the end. So you see, I find that wasn't the place for me..There was a lady that do the English where you read books. She was good but for some of us it wasn't good because you can't read well and others have finished while you're still spelling and struggling to get the words out..."

I asked Steve, the Return to Study course tutor at Keltan House, how this could have happened. He replied.

"There's no central co-ordination for Basic Education in the college whatsoever, there's no pattern to it. If they are adults they should be passed on to me...there's nobody in the college that has any particular responsibility for literacy or basic level so it's really nobody's area. I'm concerned with it but it's not my direct college responsibility. The college doesn't recognise it. There are no resources for it..."

This lack of central co-ordination for Basic Education must also be the reason why Annabel, now an AEI student, was placed in unsuitable classes,

"I first went to Hackney College and asked for reading and writing and they gave me a form to fill out. I filled it out and went to the class.. it was at Keltan House. English, it was called. I felt so embarrassed. I just couldn't cope with the work they give me..so they told me to come to another class and they gave me an address down Bethnal Green.."

Annabel said that, although the students in the Bethnal Green class were not all so advanced,

"...the ones that was a bit like me, especially the boys, was a bit childish and didn't really care if they didn't learn anything."

(iii) Finding the Right Course

The fears expressed by Justin, a student attending an AEI class on day-release from work, must be based on such experiences, whether his own or that

of other students. In the course of a group discussion I asked Justin about his plans. He said he had thought about going to Hackney College for maths but,

> "I don't know, I don't have the courage to go and get the entry form or whatever."

The conversation continued:

Me: Do you think somebody could help you with that?
Justin: Yes. Althea (tutor) tried last year but I still didn't get there..

I asked Althea what she had done.

A: I got the prospectus for Hackney College and before I did that I talked to him about the sort of things he could do. Then I get the prospectus and we went through it but he never bothered. But I do feel that Justin can move on, especially in maths. But it probably means taking him there, physically, and probably staying with him..

I asked Justin if he thought that would work.
Justin: Yes. That would work.

So I asked him to try and say exactly what he was nervous about.
Justin: Making sure I get in the right class. I don't want to end up in a class that I can't really manage and then having to fall out later.

Justin said that he did not feel confident to find the right person and to explain that to them. I asked if he had ever tried.
"No. I stood outside it but I never..."

The discussion in Justin's class had spurred the tutor into action. I returned a week later to find the group sitting around a table strewn with leaflets and prospectuses and the ALFA 'Return to Learning' directory. Althea was wading through a pile of glossy brochures from Hackney College. The front covers were all very similar but each brochure was for a different 'faculty'. Althea was trying to find a maths class for Justin which he would be able to attend on day release. It seemed there were only evening classes or 15-21 hour courses.

Maxine, a middle-aged student, was shortly to be made redundant from her part-time job. During our discussion the previous week Maxine had said she would need to look for another job. She then added, wistfully,

> "..but maybe if I could do a course in making men's clothes, tailoring.."

I had asked Maxine if she knew where to find out about a course like that. She said,

> "I feel that I would have to ask someone but I never think about it before, but I think here's the best place."

But Maxine was disappointed. We could not find anything. I suggested that she look in 'Floodlight' for an AEI class in September, but knew that this would be difficult. 'Floodlight', the very comprehensive ILEA directory of adult Education classes is not easy to use if your literacy skills are limited. The issue of 'Floodlight' for each September is not available until after classes have closed for the summer. It is therefore an annual problem for tutors who want to help students find their way through it in time for the September enrolment dates.

Miriam, a mother of four children who are all now at school, was very keen to go on the Adult Foundation Course at Ayrsome Road which is very near her home. She had dismissed this as an impossibility because, in the entry for this course in the ALFA directory, it states that the hours for this course are "between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm" and these hours were longer than her children's school day. Because the course is also described as a "flexible, part-time course", I suggested that Miriam should contact the course tutor because I felt sure that she would be able to negotiate attendance from 10 - 3.30. It was not easy to persuade her because, I felt, Miriam wanted to be able to go along and sign up for a course without asking for special favours and without having to worry about missing the first half-hour each morning.

I took this issue up with the Adult Foundation Course tutors at Ayrsome Road. They had been describing their teaching style as supportive and easy-going. The conversation continued:

Me: So you're quite tolerant of people who have other commitments?
Tutor: Oh, we have to be. Our courses don't start 'til 10.00.
Me: It says 9.30 in the prospectus.
Tutor: If you put 10 o'clock on the timetable it would be eleven before they came but if you say 9.30 then the one or two who can't make it can have individual work.
Me: Yes, but for somebody outside who has children at school, they'll exclude themselves if it says 9.30.
Tutor: Yes, well that's not why it's there, it's because the brochure is out of date, because there's no publicity, very little publicity...

For those 'in the know' it is clear that the most accurate information about a Further Education course can only be had by making personal contact with the course tutor. Many AEI tutors are not aware of this, and even if they are, it will often take several telephone calls to make contact with teaching staff in the local FE College.

ABE tutors are understandably reluctant to raise hopes and expectations when 'moving on' can feel like an enormous risk for a student who is only beginning to gain confidence in a supportive setting.

(iv) Moving On

In Chapter 2 I described the way in which adults use classes in different ways and the same class may serve different needs. A 'linked skills' class, like 'Literacy with Dressmaking' or 'Spelling with Word Processing', may be the point of entry to Adult Education for some students while it may represent a 'next step' for a student who has gained the confidence in a basic literacy class to seek further skills.

There are classes and courses throughout Adult and Further Education which are designed for adults who already have basic literacy skills but need to brush up and regain confidence in their academic ability while finding out about opportunities for education, training and employment. These classes are also possible progression routes for literacy students.

It must be stressed that students choose courses for all kinds of reasons apart from the curriculum content of the course. Is there a creche? Is it local? How does the timing fit in with the other demands in my life? Can I afford it? Do I know anybody else who has been there? Is the tutor sympathetic? Where does it lead? Will I be able to cope with the work?

While all these considerations come into play, many students rely on their tutors to guide them in their choices,

> "Eventually I would like to take GCE if I can get to that standard...I don't know how long it will take.."

> "I'll always keep coming to this class but when I'm good at reading and writing maybe then I'll decide what I'm going to do, maybe next year..Edwina and Bill [tutors], they will tell me what to do."

This places a heavy burden of responsibility on tutors of ABE classes who, if they are to fulfil their students' expectations, need to be well-informed about appropriate courses to aim for and about realistic routes towards long-term goals.

(v) Ready to Move On

As part of our statistical survey, 160 of the 375 returns included some indication of the 'level' at which the student was working.(fig.vi) The comments were made only where the tutor saw this as being particularly relevant, and they are not easy to categorise. For example, 'Learning Difficulties' gives no indication of the students' literacy skills, but I have assumed that students whose needs are thus labelled will not be considered 'Ready to Move On'. From this sample we can get some idea of the proportion of students for whom it is appropriate to be considering progression routes in any one year.

About half of the students were described as either beginner readers or literacy students making progress. While many of these will eventually be considering moving on, they are likely to be among those who want to concentrate on their basic skills before considering further options. Just over a quarter of the sample were described as Advanced

fig. vi
ABILITY LEVELS

	STILL ATTENDING JULY 1988		TOTAL FROM TARGET OCT'86		
	HRC	*AEI*	*HRC*	*AEI*	*% Total (of 160)*
'LEARNING DIFFICULTIES' ('Beginners' or 'Middle')	1	8	2	18	13%
'BEGINNERS' (Beginner Literacy students)	2	6	5	15	13%
'MIDDLE' (Literacy students making progress)	5	18	6	41	29%
'READY' (Students ready to move on, e.g.to Adult Foundation Course)	2	6	3	23	16%
'ADVANCED' (capable of GCSE level work)	1	4	6	36	26%
'ESL'[English as a Second Language](could be any level bilingual students)		3	-	5	3%
TOTALS	11	45	22	138	100%

students, capable of GCSE level work. Many of these would already have been following college courses and attending an ABE class for language, literacy or numeracy support. Almost all of the students in this category had left since October 1986.

The remaining quarter were categorised as Ready to Move On in the sense that they were ready to continue to develop their literacy and/or numeracy skills but in an atmosphere where the general expectations might be higher and where the individual support from the tutor might be reduced. Some of them had been attending literacy classes for many years.

PART TWO

Some Progression Routes

In the following pages I describe some of the work which is going on in Hackney to try and meet the need for continuing education for who students who fall into this category.

First I look at the links created between ABE classes and two FE college courses which were designed for 'post-basic' literacy students. Both examples illustrate that a fundamental difference lies between the concept of a 'post-basic' literacy student who, once given the opportunity, is able to learn quickly and the ABE student who is 'ready to move on' after many years of slow progress.

I list briefly some of the classes in Hackney AEI which can serve as progression routes for ABE students and I believe this area of provision may have been expanded since the research was carried out.

The Comet Parents' Centre is a unique example of an Adult Education Institute reaching out to a group of potential students who would not have considered themselves as such without the lure of creche provision for their young children.

I include a section on the transfer from FE to Adult Education Institutes for students with Learning Difficulties. Finally I draw the reader's attention to the very important, but largely unrecognised work which is being done by both Hackney Reading Centre and the Adult Education Institute in supporting students who are following courses in Further and Higher Education.

(a) Hackney Reading Centre 'College Links for Adults' Course

In the section above on 'Finding the Right Course', Justin articulated a need of which many ABE tutors are aware - the need for a tutor to accompany him on his first visit to college, for somebody who he trusts to ensure that he does not 'end up in a class that I can't really manage'.

It was this awareness which prompted the HRC tutors to set up a 'bridging' course in which some of their students would be able to spend time at City and East London College with the support of the tutors they already know. Eight students from HRC attended classes on four days a week for ten weeks. On two days they went to the Reading Centre and on the other two days they joined the six students who were following the one year Adult Foundation Course at Jubilee Street. The Reading Centre tutors joined with the college tutors to teach the combined groups and this double staffing was seen by all concerned as essential to the success of the project.

This project was certainly successful in that six of the Hackney Reading Centre students subsequently enrolled on the full year's Adult Foundation Course which began in September 1988 and have attended the college regularly throughout the year. In a full report of the College Links Course * the two Reading Centre tutors, Irene Schwab and Jean Milloy, describe the course content and the differences between the two institutions as well as providing a thorough evaluation of the experience from the perspectives of students and tutors. Most of the students had spent several years attending literacy classes before embarking on this transition and they met the challenge of more intensive and demanding work with determination and pride.

Two of these six students are now hoping to pursue clear vocational goals but, when the course ends this summer, there is no appropriate provision for the other four. They have made a successful transition to college and, with a great deal of support, begun to work more independently, to explore new subjects and to develop new skills. This does not mean that they have suddenly been able to shed a lifetime of educational disadvantage and accelerate the pace of their learning to match the demands of, say, a GCSE or an Access course. They may require several more years of general study before they feel satisfied with their own level of education or able to pursue more ambitious vocational goals. The lack of this kind of provision in FE Colleges was illustrated in my discussions with FE course tutors at both City & East London and Hackney College.

(b) AEI Chelmer Road Class - Visit to Hackney College (Keltan House)

Many tutors, from both the FE Colleges and the AEI, felt that the most productive links are those made personally between course tutors.

At Chelmer Road, three literacy tutors work together in one room. This has enabled them to establish an 'easy' group and a 'hard' group where tutors and students can move easily between the two. The students decide for themselves when they wish to join the "hard" group and sometimes

* *'College Links For Adults - Hackney Reading Centre', by J. Milloy & I.Schwab (Education for Unemployed Adults Project ILEA/REPLAN 1989)*

just move over for specific topics. Most of these students attend for two sessions a week and the tutors change over so that each tutor will teach both levels every week. Thus the tutors are able to meet the needs of those students who do not want or need to be 'pushed' while providing more demanding work for those who are ready for it.

The tutors also contacted Steve, the course tutor of the Return to Study course at Hackney College (Keltan House), and arranged for the literacy students to visit the college and ask about this particular course. Although Steve refers to this as a 'Return to Study' course, it is also described in the college publicity as an 'Adult Foundation' course. I spoke with some of the ten students who went on this visit and also with the tutors at both the college and the AEI. I asked the students if they had thought of going to college before the visit was arranged. Most of them had not,

> "Well, we never even know about it before."

> "I had no idea what was going on there. I liked the college but I did thought it was for expert people who was already going on further exams and things like that. I didn't know people like us we could go there. But I don't know. When we come here we have our tutors, but there - no. We have to work on our own he said..."

I asked if they could say in what ways the college course was different from their AEI class. It was a difficult question, but Millie, who had said she was keen to go on and do office skills, tried to explain,

> "I think it is a bigger school and you take things more seriously and there you try to aim for something and you make sure that you want it and then you try to get it."

The other students appeared to support Millie's description but they all found it difficult to explain why they would have a different attitude to their learning. Edith suggested,

> "Well, there they do typing and computering and its all under one cover..."

Bill, one of the literacy tutors, pointed out that they would have to work through a set number of assessments. Edith added,

> "And I think you get a certificate at the end of the course."

Glenda, a woman who is not yet middle-aged but who suffers from chronic asthma, had excluded herself already,

> "I think its a course that prepare you to get a job. So for me, I can't go to work so it won't be good for me. I think it's more for younger people..."

Millie disagreed,

> "I don't think it's younger people, it's just up to you what you want to do whether you are old or young - but it's aiming for something and you want to see to it that you get it..."

It is generally true that people learn more slowly as they get older. I am not sure whether this was why Delia said,

> "I would really like to move on but it's my age against me. I would like to help my third generation but it's my age against me. But I would really like to move on, to have more knowledge and understanding about different things..."

Delia had been to other AEI classes and had passed exams in piano playing and music theory. Her age was certainly not preventing her from learning but, sadly, I found that she was right about her age being against her in terms of 'opportunities' to learn.

Steve told me that the Return to Study course caters for the 'post-basic' literacy student, and I wondered whether this category would match the group I have described as 'ready to move on'. However, Steve explained how the concept of 'post-basic' does not encompass any idea of the 'pace' of learning or provide for the student who has spent many 'adult' years in reaching this stage.

> "...We can deal with people who learn quickly, so it doesn't matter if they start off from a basic level, pick up quickly, fine we can take them on. But what we don't have the resources for are people who have a slower pace...because the others are moving on quickly and we are encouraging them all the time.."

I asked about the Chelmer Road group who had been to visit him,

> "Well, I got the impression that some, probably the younger ones, that's what they really wanted to do. They wanted to go on to another course, on to qualifications, and that would be alright. But some of them, maybe some of the older women, I wasn't so sure about..."

Those students, including Delia, who wanted to apply for the Return to Study course, had filled in a simple application form in which they were asked to write down their reasons for wanting to do the course. Steve showed me these forms and outlined the criteria he would use for selection. On the basis of the short statements, Steve was selecting those which showed a clear vocational commitment, like 'I want to go on and do Business Studies'. Delia's form was written in a clear but slightly shaky handwriting which betrayed her age. She wrote that she wanted to do the course to 'further my education'. Steve put her form down saying,

> "I don't think this is the sort of person for us."

This particular course prides itself on its rec-

ord of 'progressing' students onto other college courses or into jobs at the end of a year. If you select only those students who you know will be able to follow a college course in a years time, then this record is not difficult to achieve. Steve agreed that this was true but said that 'the college is in a survival situation'. There was a degree of 'self-selection', he said, in that those students who lacked sufficient basic skills either did not start or did not stay on the course. I asked Steve if there were any students who had completed the course but had not moved on. He told me about Bernadette,

> "She's just finishing her second year with us and I think she goes to the AEI as well. Bernadette has benefitted a lot in social terms as she gets along with people and we've seen her gain confidence in that way. But her reading and writing has stayed virtually unchanged. And I just notice more and more how none of us have the time to devote to her. So, being honest, we weren't giving her what she needed. She needed to be able to move at a much slower pace and our tutors see that as no progress but it's just because they set the scale totally differently. She needs a scale where she can see the progress. I've just been almost powerless to do anything about it. And there's no progression for her in the college because she hasn't got up to the required level."

The feeling of being in a 'survival situation' militates against any radical change unless it can be shown to generate financial support. Money is forthcoming for vocational training and the first call on resources for Basic Education in Hackney College is to support those students who are already 'vocationally committed'. There are students in the Building Department, for example, who need help with their language, literacy or numeracy skills. There is only one part-time numeracy teacher to provide this kind of support throughout the college. When the college used to run 'Pre-TOPS' courses, (a one year course to prepare students for entry tests to the Training Opportunities Programme), there was a double-staffing allocation which allowed for individual students to receive extra help. Steve told me that,

> "That's a thing of the past...if anything this college is going very quickly in the opposite direction. Our section now has a BTec Leisure Course, an Access to Business Studies, Access to Science, City & Guilds Sports 481..and nothing, no commitment to the basic level. My responsibility now is to the bi-lingual students - there's an enormous structure in the college for bi-lingual students."

Of the ten literacy students who visited Keltan House, one has enrolled on a Business Skills course at the college and was reported to be doing well during the first term. Five other students had said they wanted to do a Hackney College course but were prevented from doing so, one because of her age, one because of ill-health, one because of a clash with working hours and two because the college had no creche facilities. Four of these are still attending the AEI class at Chelmer Road as are those who did not choose to move on.

(c)Progression within the Adult Education Institute

Despite the difficulties encountered, many of the tutors at Hackney Reading Centre and the Adult Education Institute are still committed to exploring ways of easing the transition from an ABE class to a FE college course.

The AEI also runs courses which, while serving as a point of entry to Adult Education for some, are also potential 'progression routes' for literacy/numeracy students. These include:

'Wider Opportunities'
'Fresh Start for Women'
'Study Skills'

'Maths for Study' and a class which was described to me as 'Bill's slightly harder maths'!

There is no formal structure for transition from a mixed ability literacy or numeracy class to one of these courses and links seem to depend a great deal on personal contact among colleagues.

(d) The Comet Parents' Centre

The AEI class which I visited at the Comet Parents Centre is not strictly an ABE class although taught by a literacy tutor.

Without exception, the students who I met there were attending the class primarily because class attendance was a condition of using the creche. The students displayed ambivalent feelings about education in general. Ann, a Londoner with mixed racial features, told me how she had asked Millie about her country of origin. Millie came from the Seychelles but when Ann asked her where the Seychelles were she had felt exasperated by Millie's reply,

> "I asked her where it was. She said 'In the Indian Ocean'. Where's the Indian Ocean? Now how the hell am I meant to know where it is? I've never been further than a train before and she's telling me the Indian Ocean."

So I asked Ann if she would like to find out more about the world, to look at some maps and see where places are.

> "Yes", she replied, "But don't put it down to no Geography and History though - I don't want to know none of that rubbish".

I felt that such apparently casual or aggressive attitudes were merely the defensiveness of people whose expectations of teachers and formal education are based on experiences of disapproval, humiliation and rejection. One woman had been

offered a place on a Secretarial course at Hackney College but,

> "..you can't go to put their name down till you've got accepted at the college. Then they say you're accepted but you can't do it because you can't get your child in the creche.."

The other students seemed to have no idea that they might be able to continue with their education. Sharon said she would like to do drama and I asked her how she might go about finding a class,

> "I wouldn't," she said, "I don't know where to go. I don't know anybody who knows anything about that sort of thing. I suppose I could write to Esther Rantzen..."

If these women were a little younger they might have comprised a target group for a 'detached youth work' programme in which professional workers set out to meet disaffected young people on their own terms and in their own, safe territory in order to help them to identify and meet some basic social and educational needs. A tutor in a class like this needs the support of an institution which can recognise the value of this kind of work.

I felt that the students in this class were people who are desperately in need of education and to whom Adult and Further Education, if there is any commitment to serving disadvantaged groups in the community, must reach out and meet through whatever channels (in this case, child care provision) might be available. Such a class may provide a lifeline for these women and the direction which they take at this point in their lives will have incalculable effects on the quality of those lives for themselves and their children.

(e) From FE to the AEI - Progression for students with Learning Difficulties

Students who leave 'Special Schools' are often referred to 'Special' full-time courses in FE Colleges. On completing such courses, these young adults turn to (or are referred to) Adult Education Institutes as 'the next place to go'. Sometimes this is appropriate and the provision for students with Learning Difficulties is being developed with far wider horizons than those of ABE. Literacy and Numeracy skills are just one small aspect of a concern among specialist staff to meet the full range of social and developmental needs which affect the quality of life and social integration of their students. Sometimes, however, students are referred to the Adult Education Institute when what they really want and need is productive employment. The shortage of sheltered employment or day centre places means that an Adult Education class is their only opportunity for social contact. It seemed to me that students with Learning Difficulties are successfully integrated into a mixed ability ABE class when both tutor and student are sure that this is where they should be. The Hackney College tutor responsible for a full-time course for school-leavers with Learning Difficulties described a student who had attended an ABE class for a long time.

> "...and I felt that she'd virtually reached her ceiling in that but there were other avenues which she could have explored in terms of her skills. I think that's probably the case for quite a lot of the students that I get, that while I hope that by the time they leave they will all be able to write their name and address and perhaps fill in a very simple form..it's possible to just keep on flogging that when really they're not going to make a lot of progress...they'd be better off developing other skills that are going to help them gain independence."

Hackney AEI is meeting this challenge by providing in-service training for staff in all departments and working both to integrate students in mainstream classes such as Art or Keep Fit as well as to provide specialist classes for Travel Training or Self Advocacy.

(f) Language, Literacy and Numeracy Support - the role of ABE in the provision of support for FE and HE courses

Nearly all the students in the 'Advanced' category of our survey (see fig.vi "Ability Levels") were following other courses in Further or Higher Education and attending ABE classes for support in the Basic Skills needed to follow their chosen course. So this was an area of work which accounts for about a quarter (26%) of the student enrolments in our survey of ABE classes but about which there seems to be no clear policy. One FE course tutor regularly refers students to ABE classes for extra help while another denies that this occurs at all. It is possible that FE course tutors have no idea of the extent to which many of their students rely on the support they get at Hackney Reading Centre or the AEI. Some students bring college work into an ABE class while some prefer to keep it separate and not to tell the course tutor that they are attending. The first numeracy class at Hackney Reading Centre supported half a dozen students from a B.Ed degree course who said the college did not provide the basic maths revision they needed in order to grapple with statistics.

It seems important to clarify policy and acknowledge current practice in this aspect of the links between FE and Adult Education. It is an area worthy of full-scale investigation as a challenge to the kind of institutional rivalry which militates against access to the comprehensive provision that may already be available if only students and staff can find it.

Conclusions

1. At any given time, it is likely that, of the students in Hackney ABE classes:

   - about half will be students whose needs are best met in the classes which they are already attending,

   - about a quarter will be students using the ABE class either to support their work on other courses or to prepare for particular courses they intend to follow,

   - about a quarter will be students who have progressed enough in an ABE class to be ready for more demanding work with *slightly* reduced individual tutor support.

2. Individual tutors in the AEI evaluate student progress in a variety of ways while at HRC there is a framework to support ongoing and annual evaluation.

3. While the majority of tutors give some kind of educational advice, this work appears to get little practical support from senior staff or through accessible information networks.

4. While many tutors are aware of the existence of the Hackney Education Advice Service, I found no evidence of close links between advice workers and ABE classes.

5. Factors such as timing, cost, transport and child-care facilities are generally as important to students as curriculum content or vocational orientation of any college course.

   Creche provision, in particular, can bring students into Adult or Further Education who may not otherwise have considered it as an available option.

6. Many tutors felt ambivalent about encouraging students to move on because the fear of failure and disappointment is based on real experiences which often take a long time to overcome.

7. However, students often expect tutors to take responsibility for deciding when the student is ready to move on and for guiding them in appropriate directions.

8. Practical efforts are currently being made to overcome some of these difficulties. For example, the HRC 'College Links' course, the AEI Chelmer Road/Hackney College (Keltan House) link and courses such as 'Maths for Study' at the AEI which are designed to help students prepare for college courses. These require further monitoring and evaluation.

9. These efforts to establish links with Further Education have already exposed the lack of provision in FE for adults who learn slowly. ABE classes provide for students who need to acquire and develop basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Through the confidence gained in the acquisition of new skills, many adult students want to use them in order to study aspects of general education to which they previously had no access.

10. Discrimination against older students applying for FE courses appears to be linked with the increased emphasis on 'vocational commitment' as a qualification for selection in FE.

Recommendations

This report has concentrated on the experience of adult literacy students in an area of inner city hardship. This target group will not be the same as a group of adult literacy students in Surrey or Aberdeen. But any commitment to equality of opportunity in education must recognise that the greater the initial disadvantage, the more time and resources will be needed to compensate for previous barriers to learning.

The recommendations below assume that such resources will be found:

1. Policy

(a) Progress in adult basic education can only be defined in the broad sense of some positive change, not necessarily in terms of measurable acquisition of skills.

(b) Appropriate progression routes need to be established and the human resources made available to support students through transition from ABE to other adult education or training provision.

(c) There should be no time limit on a student's attendance in ABE classes.

(d) Further Education Colleges should review their role in the provision of general education for older students and for students who, while committed to further education, are not ready to direct this towards specific vocational goals.

2. Management (Adult and Further Education)

(a) To assist frequent,regular attendance (and thus shorten total time needed), institutions need to seek funds to secure and/or maintain:

(i) ABE provision in a variety of locations at a variety of times.
(ii) child-care provision (creche and after school)
(iii) work-release courses
(iv) residential courses with grants for students and proper pay for staff.
(v) provision during college holiday periods

(b) Managers should ensure that there is somebody responsible for supporting students when there are changes of tutor, location, timing or composition of a class.

(c) Managers should establish a framework for evaluating student progress which seeks to overcome isolation of part-time tutors, to support tutors in identifying criteria for such evaluation and to validate aspects of learning and progress which may not be easy to measure.

(d) An allocation of tutor hours should be made for ABE tutors to arrange group visits to specific colleges/courses.

(e) Those responsible in all areas of Adult, Further and Higher Education should consult ABE staff about the accessibility of information before compiling publicity, prospectuses, directories etc. where these include courses aimed at students who may wish to move on from ABE.

(f) Managers in Further and Adult Education in a geographical area should meet to draw up policy and a code of practice which acknowledges and facilitates the support (language, literacy and numeracy) given in ABE classes to students following FE courses.

3. Education Advice Services

A substantial time allocation for a local Education Advice Worker (preferably one with some experience of ABE) should be devoted to visiting ABE classes. The purpose of such visits would be twofold; firstly, to advise tutors and students on opportunities for progression and secondly to listen to the expressed needs of the students and feed back relevant points (e.g. on timing or location of courses and on degree of support required, including support for those with Special Needs) to colleges and other education providers.

4. Staff Development & Training

In order to improve the quality of provision and the conditions of work for tutors, in-service training should be offered on:

(a) Issues of teacher expectations and slow learning.

(b) The use of labels - dyslexia, Learning Difficulties etc. and their effect on practice in teaching and learning.

(c) Teaching erratic attenders -exploring possibilities for 'Open Learning', design and use of home study materials etc.

(d) The role of autobiography in adult literacy learning and the implications for adult learning of blocks caused by social, economic, physical and emotional disadvantages in childhood.

(e) Training for Further Education staff should be offered on ways of adapting existing courses to accommodate adults who have only recently acquired literacy and numeracy skills and will need to work at a slower pace and with more individual support than is currently available

5. Further Research

a) All the issues in the section on 'Training' above are aspects of ABE which require further research, both theoretical and practical.

(b) Now that a target group of students has been identified and an agenda for enquiry into progression for ABE students has been defined in this report, much could be learnt from a thorough, longitudinal study of the progress of the students who I have classified as 'Ready to Move On'.

(c) There is a need for a more comprehensive review and evaluation of current progression routes for ABE students.

(d) More research is needed on progression for numeracy students and on the relationship between practical numeracy skills and the arithmetic or mathematics required in vocational training and further education.

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Printed by the Reprographics Unit, The Polytechnic of North London, Holloway Road, London N7 8DB